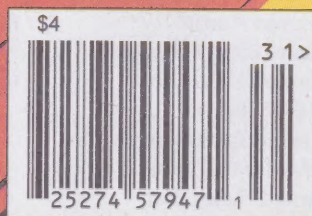


# fifth estate

Anarchist Review of Books

Spring 2023





**T**he photo above of a traffic jam on a Brazilian highway could be a metaphor for life today. A scarred landscape littered with trucks filled with the everyday stuff of commerce going nowhere.

The trucks carrying what are now the necessities of modern society are stalled at a local level but reflect the entire global economy and culture. As the planetary integrated system becomes increasingly complex, so does its capacity for collapse.

It is increasingly clear that the current state of affairs is untenable. Climate crisis, wars, massive urban populations, all coordinated and policed by centralized systems, perhaps soon to be only one, becomes more inflexible and less convivial. It's not a pretty picture, but forewarned is forearmed.

We need to act before we are acted upon.

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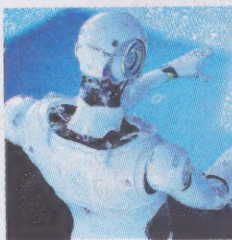
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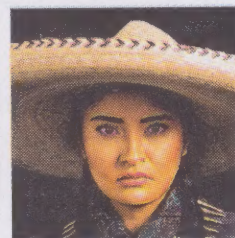
COVER: Hugh D'Andrade from a 2008 Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair poster. [hughillustration.com](http://hughillustration.com).



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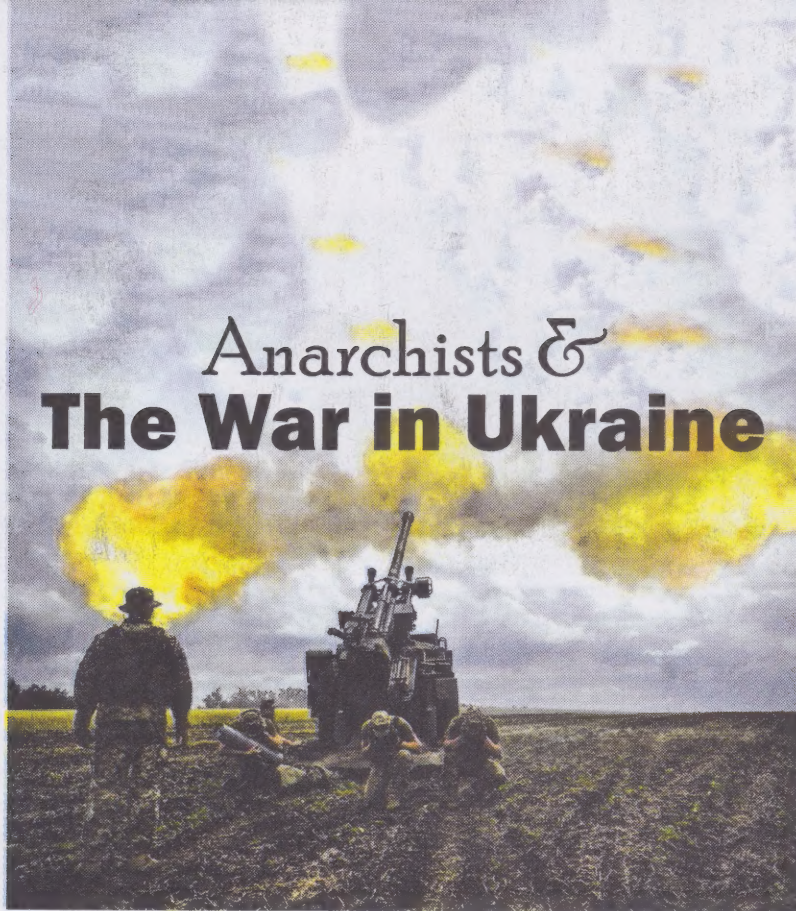
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# Anarchists & The War in Ukraine



THOMAS MARTIN

**D**espite the appeal of nationalism among today's Ukrainians, the legacy of anarchism in that tormented region has not been forgotten. In fact, it is resurgent, though not always in ways that anarchists in more comfortable lands might like.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's claim that Ukraine is historically part of Russia is almost accurate. However, Russia is the child of Ukraine. The ancient state of Kievan Rus grew up around Kyiv, the pivot of a Baltic-to-Constantinople trade route.

Until 1991, Ukraine had never been independent. Over centuries, parts of the territory were absorbed by Poland, Turkey, Lithuania, Austria, and Russia. The very name Ukraine means borderland, conveying perhaps a subconscious feeling of not quite belonging anywhere.

While this complex history of shifting borders was misery for the Ukrainians, it had the effect of Europeanizing the region in many ways, making its culture, religion and language different from those of Russia. Thus, the opinion expressed by many Ukrainians today that they are Europeans, not Russians. It may also be a factor in the appeal of anarchism to many Ukrainians—the people matter more than the state.

Although there is value in knowing the past, what matters is the present. It's clear that Ukrainians (with the exception of the ethnic Russians) are not Russians, don't want to be Russians, and now that they are under brutal attack by Russians, no longer even like Russians. They do not want to

be colonized.

Russia has a long history of demonizing the Ukrainian people as kulaks (wealthy peasants who exploit the poor), Nazis and heretics (to Russian Orthodoxy). The war is a product of Slavophilism, a creed that Putin embraces. Slavophilism is about autocracy, anti-Semitism, Russian Orthodoxy, and the moral superiority of a unique Russian culture and traditions. Above all, Slavophilism is a prisoner of the past.

A true Slavophile would have trouble understanding why Ukrainians don't want to be Russians. But something more sinister than Putin's Slavophile megalomania is at work here. He is driven by kleptocratic capitalism, the corrupt corporate oligarchy that keeps him in power, and whom he enriches in return.

**T**he story of the rise and fall of anarchism in Ukraine in the years following the October Revolution is well known to anarchists, and to most Ukrainians. Nestor Makhno (1888–1934) not only led an anarchist uprising after the Bolshevik 1917 revolution, but also wrote extensively about the dream of establishing anarchism in his homeland. The crushing of this insurgency resulted in the establishment of state capitalism and communist tyranny.

The story of the Makhnovisti was suppressed throughout the Soviet era. If Makhno or other anarchists were mentioned at all, they were portrayed as decadent enemies of Marxism-Leninism. Anarchism in Ukraine today is under the triple pressures of an existential battle against Russia, numerous



The Makhnovist Movement remains in the memories of many in Ukraine. These lead models portray many of the leading figures including Marusya Nikiiforova (see next page).

for a Ukraine separate from Russia, but not a Ukrainian state) and downplaying his anarchist ideals. There are also people who maintain a genuine anarchist perspective.

"Most 'real' anarchists in Ukraine," writes Ukrainian journalist and economic analyst Denys Gorbach at [opendemocracy.net](http://opendemocracy.net), "work at the grass roots level, involved in squats, punk concerts, distributing food to homeless people (Food not Bombs) and so on."

But nearly all anarchist groups and collectives are involved in the fighting. The fact that virtually the entire population has mobilized in self-defense against Russia puts political ideology in abeyance. This creates a dilemma for all radicals. Yes, the Ukrainians must defend themselves, and yes, it is essential to call for the dismantling of the military-industrial-imperialist system that makes and sells those arms.

Many radicals point out that the Ukrainians are accepting help from governments and organizations that are complicit in genocidal and other repressive operations around the world. It's a question of priorities: is the existential threat to Ukraine worth accepting this help? Can you refuse help, however problematic, if your life depends on it?

The Territorial Defense Forces (TDF), the reserve arm of the Ukrainian army, consists partly of veterans of the humiliating defeat in Crimea in 2014, partly of volunteers including foreigners, and of a motley variety of men and women civilians with little training. Rightists, leftists, and anarchists can be found in the ranks. Some anarchists work with the leftist Resistance Committee, and some identify with Green anarchism.

The regular army has used the name Makhno's Bow for the forces defending Guliaipole, Makhno's hometown. At least some of the trade unions support anarchist goals. A "Feminist Manifesto" published in July 2022 advocates an anarchist philosophy.

Since independence, Ukraine has been a corrupt faux-democracy, like other post-USSR states. Bribery is endemic at all levels of society and politics. Bureaucrats steal public funds. Many workers are so poorly paid that participation in corruption is a matter of survival.

Even assuming an eventual Ukrainian state victory, it is likely that Ukrainians will still have to deal with a corrupt government. Nevertheless, it's encouraging that Makhno and the anarchists of a century ago have not been forgotten.

Thomas Martin is Professor Emeritus of history and humanities at Sinclair College in Dayton, Ohio. Although retired, he continues to subvert the dominant paradigm as an adjunct. He also taught at Antioch College and has published several books and many articles.

right-wing organizations, and a corrupt Kiev government.

Organizations calling themselves anarchist appeared in Ukraine and other former Soviet-bloc nations as soon as the USSR collapsed in 1991. Understanding the activities of grassroots anarchist organizations in Ukraine requires weaving through a labyrinth of social media, complex politics and personalities.

Groups have appeared, disappeared, splintered and recombined in bewildering ways. The so-called 2014 Maidan Revolution amplified the confusion, and the 2022 Russian invasion added another layer of complexity as groups all across the political spectrum took up arms. The Arsenal Kyiv Hooligans proclaim on Instagram, ("We don't want your love. We don't need your respect.") RevDia and Black Headquarter (*United Anti-authoritarian Forces of Ukraine*) look much alike posing in photos with guns, camo uniforms, burned-out Russian tanks, bombed-out hospitals, more guns. All need help and accept humanitarian aid for civilian victims as well as for resistance fighters.

It's not easy for outsiders to distinguish the self-styled oxymoronic "anarcho-capitalists" from the anarcho-syndicalists or from anarchists of different tendencies.

The 2022 Russian invasion sparked new interest in Makhno, though today's situation is not comparable to that of a century ago.

The Makhnovisti temporarily worked both with and against the Reds and the Whites when it was advantageous, and also resisted German and Austro-Hungarian invaders, as they defended anarchist communes and other self-managed entities like the free soviets against the takeover by any of the authoritarian forces arrayed against them, regardless of the label. Now, as then, Ukraine is seething with grassroots organizations and militias, but neither the enemy nor the objectives are the same.

Ukrainian independence in 1991 saw the re-penetration of Western capital and consumerism bringing with it a dazzling flood of Nike sneakers, Big Macs, and iPhones. This encouraged some people to adopt right-wing frames of mind. Many rightists, who are often well educated and work in the informatics field, have appropriated anarchist language, the red-and-black flag, and even Makhno himself, portraying him as a nationalist (not true; he called



A czarist police photo of Marusya Nikiforova. She was sentenced to death, but escaped.

## Move Over Nestor Makhno! Here Comes Marusya Nikiforova

NORMAN NAWROCKI

**S**he was known as either Maria or Marusya Nikiforova, a fearless and feared, bad-ass Ukrainian anarchist warrior who led her own army during the Russian Civil War and peasant rebellions in the early 20th century. But few people have heard about her, either in Ukraine or elsewhere.

A contemporary of another famous Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno, Nikiforova (1885–1919), was at one point better known in parts of Ukraine than him and also considered more important. But because she was a woman, she is mostly ignored in histories of the period, including anarchist ones. There are also few documentary sources about her life since she spent most of it underground and only surfaced in the public eye as part of the Makhnovist movement for two remarkable years from 1917 to 1919.

Malcolm Archibald, an anarchist scholar versed in Russian and Ukrainian anarchist history and publisher of the former Black Cat Press, wrote a key work in English in 2007 about her life entitled, *Atamasha: The Story of Maria Nikiforova: the Anarchist Joan of Arc*. He documents the prominent role she played in the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War that followed.

Marusya Nikiforova, an anarchist and feminist, led a short but extraordinary life. At 16, she joined an anarcho-communist group and participated in multiple bank

robberies and was accused of the murder of a guard. She was sentenced to death, but imprisoned because of her youth, escaped, organized and led her own army to defend the Revolution in Ukraine against the German Army, Ukrainian Nationalists, and White Guard (counter-revolutionary supporters of the former Czarist regime), and ultimately the Bolsheviks during 1918–1919. She also set up hospitals and schools, fed the poor, painted, and planted gardens before she was captured and executed with her husband by the Whites.

Nikiforova carried a pistol and a saber, traveling with her own armed bodyguards on either heavily armed trains or by horseback. She attended military school in Paris, helped comrades in Barcelona rob banks, and attended anarchist conferences across Europe. Unlike the anarchist Leya Feldman, originally from Odessa, who was also part of the Makhnovist movement, but who left Ukraine and continued to be active on the world anarchist scene long after, Marusya died too young.

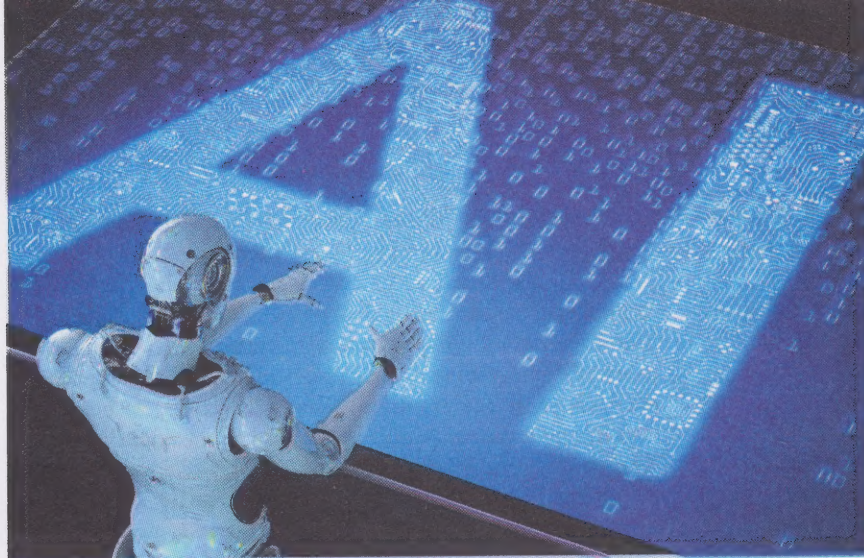
As Archibald writes, “Marusya Nikiforova is absent from the works of Peter Arshinov, Volin, and Paul Avrich. Alexandre Skirda’s book on Makhno mentions her, but only devotes one paragraph to her in a work of 400 pages.” Also, as an anti-nationalist, she was never of interest to the academy of mainstream Ukrainian historians.

Like other Makhnovist women of that period, ones like the commanders Black Marusya or Evdokia Feodosyevna Belash-Datsyuk, or the founder of the Black Cross, Olga Ilyinichna Taratuta, Marusya Nikiforova was never acknowledged for her formidable accomplishments and her exemplary role in the history of the anarchist movement. This is changing as a new generation of Ukrainian and Russian anarchist historians continue to delve into her unknown story.

She will soon be resurrected to lead her army once again across the Ukrainian steppes on-stage in my new play premiering at the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Montreal International Anarchist Theatre Festival, May 22 to May 24, 2023: *Marusya Nikiforova: Ukraine’s legendary anarchist warrior*. Written and directed by myself, the one act play will feature a local Ukrainian actor portraying Marusya. This first version will be presented in English, but later translated into French and Ukrainian.

Norman Nawrocki is a Montreal playwright whose works include a series of plays about immigrant women workers in the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, about anti-fascist women across Europe, and the experiences of Ukrainian immigrants in Canada.

His newest book, *Red Squared Montreal* (Black Rose Books, 2023), is a fictionalized chronicle about the massive Quebec student strike and social protest movement of 2012, the largest civil disobedience movement to ever rock Canada.



## Your Future as Servo-Protein

# Is ChatGPT just a new tech toy or is it Skynet?

*We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words.*

—Ursula K. Le Guin

JESS FLARITY AND PETER WERBE

ChatGPT has lit up the West in the last three months evincing delight among enthusiasts of Artificial Intelligence (AI), but great fear and loathing among critics who see its entry into a world already diminished by machines as a further ratcheting downward of what it means to be human.

The program is from San Francisco-based OpenAI's "large language model generator," meaning that it can create an extremely wide variety of responses based on a human-entered prompt. It has already gathered over 200 million individual users, many who are just curious about its capacity to produce when prompted, essays, schedules, outlines, legal briefs, presentations, speeches, emails, letters, creative works like short stories and poetry, even entire novels.

Critics of it evoke sci-fi images of anti-human AI programs in movies such as Skynet in "Terminator 2," Colossus in "The Forbin Project," or the ominous Hal in "2001: A Space Odyssey," that they see as cautionary tales applicable to this new program. But those gleeful about AI's increased qualitative capacity assure us that while ChatGPT represents the most advanced edge of machine-learning, it is not remotely close to an actual Artificial Intelligence such as portrayed in those dystopian films. Rather, it functions more like an extremely powerful sorting algorithm. Like any computer program, it also has several flaws. Its answers are biased to be both more liberal or libertarian, and it may also be subtly sexist or racist.

The algorithm also has frequent "hallucinations" when there isn't enough data to compile an answer, meaning that it will make something up to fill in the gaps. For example, when we asked it to write author biographies for our editors, it predicted that two of them were dead (we assure you they are not) and other wildly incorrect information.

All of the protagonists in the famous sci-films were possessed of an arrogance that assumed continued human dominance over their machines (Hello, Dr. Frankenstein). However, in all of the fictional scenarios, the motherboards and central processors began a quick and steep learning curve that soon outpaced those of their creators. The Terminator in the second of the film series tells a young John Connor, who will lead resistance against the machines far in the future, that it learns constantly by processing new information as does ChatGPT.

But how different is this from Facebook, Tik-Tok and other such programs? While Facebook's algorithm was originally controlled by human input, it is now changing itself without human interaction, in fact, beyond human interaction, to manipulate the wants, interests, and desires of users in a most addictive manner. Facebook's algorithm is transforming itself into a form of AI that cannot even be deciphered by its creators. It, and the other ubiquitous programs, has become so globally important in people's lives that it cannot, or at least will not be stopped by the parent corporation, government restrictions, or consumer boycotts. Its influence is that powerful over our daily lives, and all of it is produced by an algorithm that is becoming increasingly independent of humans other than the humans being the mechanics (the servo-protein) to keep the machines running the algorithm.

So, is there a straight line between this new AI program and a future where humanity is either eliminated or relegated to a position of complete dependence upon machines and their algorithms? Probably not. But, just probably. But dystopian fears aside, there are immediate effects that come at the further expense of our humanity. Like most new products out of Silicon Valley, the technology seeks to fulfill a need tech designers created that we did not know yet existed. But, there's a greater flaw at work than the bugs in

## The erosion of what it means to be human has already made us unable to distinguish between ourselves and the machine, between what is false and what is authentic.

the code. There is a further cheapening, dulling, and tapering of the value of human expression for the sake of ruthless, capitalist efficiency that the Luddites saw at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution over 200 years ago.

Although we may not end up being servo-protein for the AI overlords, the erosion of what it means to be human has already made us unable to distinguish between ourselves and the machine, between what is false and what is authentic.

What makes this case especially sinister is that OpenAI pivoted from being a non-profit company when it was founded in 2015 to a for-profit model in 2019. This was done for two reasons: Investors needed to start funneling an insane amount of money to support ChatGPT's gluttonous operating costs (it runs on the world's fifth fastest supercomputer), and because of this, the investors want comparable amounts of profit in return. These forces want to make sure that ChatGPT won't just be a toy novelty that can write Shakespeare sonnets about fast food chains; they want to replace the search engine itself.

The Fifth Estate made a similar observation regarding technological innovation 30 years ago when the publication reluctantly acquired their first computer, writing in the Summer 1993 edition, "The capitalist world, defined by the religion of science and technology, has endlessly created what immediately becomes a necessity." ChatGPT is positioning itself to become the new necessity in the gig economy, as we are no longer micro-sourcing jobs, but *thought*.

The new underclass of the techno-feudalist society will be the lowly prompt engineer, as the logical conclusion of the gig economy is for workers to exist in a blur of work-play incentivized only by capital. This is already happening. Some feminists, like Johanna Isaacson (whose recent book is reviewed elsewhere in this issue), have recognized how the effort that goes into social media is basically a new form of unpaid housework, yet social pressures continue to force young people into using products like Snapchat or TikTok or else face being ostracized by their peers. The gig economy owns all.

We loved Airbnb without realizing that we'd eventually have to rent out our own extra bedrooms to compensate for our inflated rent and taxes. We ordered delivery after delivery of Grubhub during the Covid pandemic without realizing we'd have to start working on weekends to pay the hidden fees on our restaurant bills. We have Lyft'd and Uber'd our way into becoming the drivers ourselves.

ChatGPT and other creative AI-generators like Midjourney and DALL-E have come for the last piece of humanity we believed was immune to automation: our expression, our art.

OpenAI software is biased by race, gender, sex, and polit-

ical beliefs. They have outsourced the most psychologically harmful work to exploited workers in the least developed parts of the world such as facilities in Kenya. They use whatever computational power they feel is necessary with no second thought about the damage caused to the environment. And, it completely ignores the millions of skilled writers and artists their programs have been "trained" on.

The reason that the 1% love the gig economy is because every social sub-class must feed on the next lower sub-class to survive, until the very bottom-people are hustling three jobs while being driven mad by YouTube videos about the ease of passive income. AI-generated content replacing human-made content will only make this system even more oppressive.

When asked about the philosophy of anarchism, ChatGPT states that many anarchists might find the software useful because it "decentralizes" notions of power, but this is another hallucination. The power is pointed in one direction—downward—and the blur of content made by humans and AI will make it even more difficult for the underclasses to fight against their oppressors.

Like the internet and social media before it, ChatGPT will change the trajectory of entire industries, and exist as a background presence permanently welded into the content of the internet, as well as the media. In a society where notions of truth and fake news are constantly at war with one another, this injection of the pseudo-real further damages our ability to communicate with each other authentically. We were already scrambling to find each other in the dark corridors of the internet, and now AI generators have placed eerie mannequins at every junction and crossroad.

However, we don't have to be passive in the war for reality. The sci-fi movies mentioned above give an indication of how to respond.

At the end of "The Forbin Project," Colossus, the computer network now in charge of humanity, tells Prof. Forbin, its creator, in a creepy machine voice, that "freedom is an illusion," and that "in time you will come to regard me not only with respect and awe, but with love." Forbin responds, "Never!"

And, each of us can be a John Connor leading the resistance against the machines.

By slipping into the machine of industrial capitalism and becoming another cog, we not only cease to live authentically, but become willing participants in our own destruction. We should heed the challenge from Ursula Le Guin, as the art of the written word is being infiltrated from within.

Jess Flarity frequently writes for the Fifth Estate. Peter Werbe is a member of the magazine's editorial collective.



Headquarters of the Common Ground Relief grassroots projects established after Hurricane Katrina devastated much of New Orleans in 2005. The impossible became possible.

The impossible becomes possible when we define our own reality

## John Clark's *Possible Community*

**The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism**, second edition

John P. Clark

PM Press, 2022

**ERIC LAURSEN**

**H**urricane Katrina, the disaster that hit New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in 2005, was “the most devastating experience I have lived through, but also the most uplifting and inspiring,” writes NOLA native John P. Clark, whose family goes back generations in the Crescent City.

While the State demonstrated once again its great ability to destroy life and its inability to save it, the “communities of compassion and solidarity” formed by people who lost everything to government neglect and natural disaster were the closest thing Clark had ever experienced to his “social ideal.”

*The Impossible Community*, published in 2013 and now reappearing in a second edition, is partly a tribute to the highly effective grassroots networks of mutual aid that sprouted in New Orleans after Katrina. The lessons for survival and organizing which emerged from that terrible but inspiring time, anchor some of the larger points Clark makes here.

They drive him back, for example, to German anarchist Gustav Landauer's contention that free communities can

only be built out of “free communal practice” from the ground up, that is, from concrete experience rather than by following a top-down ideology or doctrine. Social transformation is most durable when it arises not from one source or idea, but from many. From the collective wisdom of neighborhood or village assemblies, worker cooperatives, labor exchanges, community-based media, bookstores, cafes, affinity groups and intentional communities, all sharing and comparing their experience and ideas.

All of which sounds impossible only if one ignores millennia of practice in primary or base communities around the world, and pays heed only to what the State and capital want us to assume. “Reality” is whatever is enshrined in the dominant ideology, imaginary, ethos, materiality, and institutional structure,” Clark writes. The impossible becomes possible when we decide to make our own reality, which could be as humble as a really, really free market or a copwatch patrol (not to downplay the effort required to do so).

This is the practical foundation for Clark's book, but it contains a lot more. Clark is a longtime academic philosopher and frequent contributor to the *Fifth Estate*. *The Impossible Community* attempts to synthesize Hegel and John Dewey, Marcuse, Landauer, and anarchist geographer Élisée Reclus, among others, to arrive at a new understanding of freedom: the basic attribute of the kind of community he's searching for. He distinguishes authoritarian from anti-authoritarian utopias. And, he enlists the dialectic, as defined

by Hegel and Marx, to understand how and in what direction a constantly changing world develops out of contradictions between ideas and conditions.

Along the way, Clark pursues a running attack on long-time nemesis, anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin, in particular, Bookchin's criticisms of so-called lifestyle anarchism and what Clark sees as his dogmatism and tendency to divorce politics from concrete social developments and innovations. Are cooperatives and collectives really "marginal projects," as Bookchin wrote dismissively? No: they are just the sort of "diverse, multidimensional experiments in democratic processes" out of which a new society beyond the State and capitalism will be born, Clark answers.

This quarrel is just a bit dated, and already was when Clark's book was first written, but it takes him in some interesting directions.

Why is it, he asks, that the far right in the U.S. seems to be so much better at grassroots organizing today than the left, for which it was once foundational? The difference, Clark suggests, is that today the mainstream "progressive" left organizes primarily through the State—through elections, the civil service, and academia—while the reactionary right assembles its forces in direct conversation with people disaffected by the State, facilitated by social media, evangelical churches, and violent populist formations like the Proud Boys. These are the right-wing counterparts of cooperatives, collectives, and village assemblies. The right is hot; the left is cool: not necessarily to its advantage.

To demonstrate how powerful, durable, and transformative social movements can be, Clark looks beyond post-Katrina New Orleans and the communities it spawned, to the legacies of Gandhi's organizing in South Asia: the Sarvodaya ("welfare for all") movement in India and its counterpart in Sri Lanka, Sarvodaya Shramadana, which promote land redistribution, local autonomy, and a rejection of private property. Gandhi understood the need for an autonomous social transformation through a growing network of Sarvodaya organizations and villages before the State itself could be replaced. Otherwise, the revolution would simply recreate the thing it overthrew.

Clark rejects Bookchin's criticisms of the last 30 years or so of anarchist organizing, during which the movement against corporate globalization, the Occupy encampments, and the networks that built out of them made affinity groups and new forms of movement media important aspects of left organizing. Even in U.S. cities, the center of capitalist society, anarchists are developing new forms of resistance that can and should be part of the collective conversation between communities that aim to bring social and political transformation about.

Clark's demand for a "diverse, multidimensional" movement toward communitarian anarchism dovetails with his interest in the slippery term "freedom." For many if not most



Cooperatives and collectives are diverse, multidimensional experiments in democratic processes out of which a new society beyond the State and capitalism will be born.

Americans, it has largely meant freedom from coercion: from being told what to do, whether to wear masks during a pandemic, restrict their deployment of firearms, or let their kids be taught that an LGBTQ identity is not evil. Genuinely transformative change can take negative as well as positive directions.

Following Reclus's lead, Clark argues that the more important freedom is from systems of domination, ranging from bureaucracy to fascism to consumerism to today's quasi-autonomous technological systems, which deny people and communities any real control over their destinies. Only then can we enjoy "personal and communal self-determination": the freedom to build a community "that is a collective expression of our social being and our social ideals, rather than being an obstacle to them."

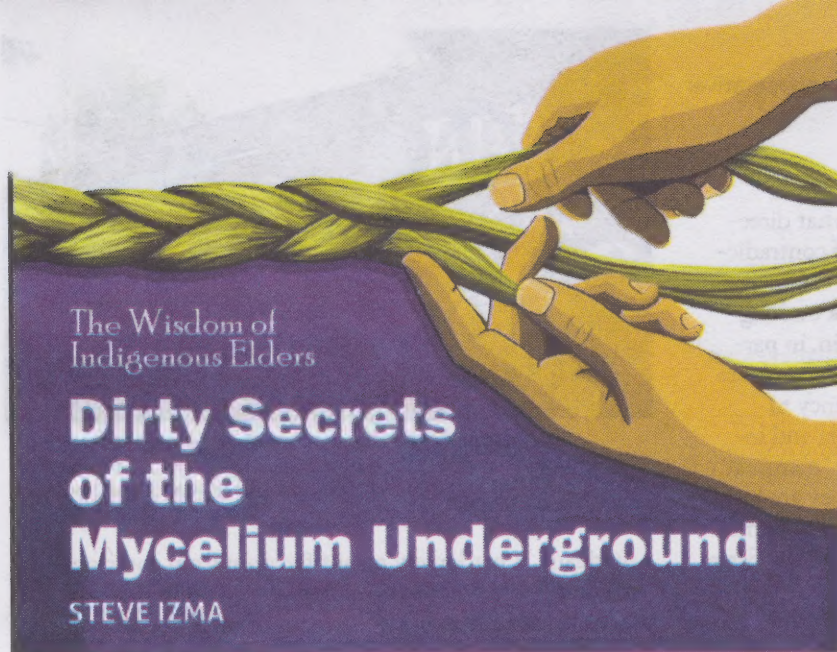
Behind this lies a further argument that libertarian communalism is not a contradiction. Out of the tension between individual needs and desires and those of the collective, a new anarchist society is born. In a postscript, Clark tells us, somewhat cryptically, that the "key step in personal and social transformation" is located "at the level of the person-in-community and each person's moment-to-moment practice within that community." I would have liked for him to explain this intriguing statement.

Not having read the first edition of this excellent book, I don't know how extensively the new edition has been revised, but would have appreciated if Clark had brought it up to date with more recent examples of transformative social movements.

How, for example, does the Gandhian philosophy behind Sarvodaya compare with the Bookchin-inspired, PYD-led Kurdish polity in northern Syria? The Rojava communities' successes and failures have a lot to tell us about the key issue that Clark does not discuss: how to achieve an anarchist social transformation under the nose of the State, without the State squashing or coopting it before it can take hold?

If Clark decides to write that book, I'll be among the first to read it.

Eric Laursen is a writer and anarchist activist. His new book, *Polymath: The Life and Professions of Dr. Alex Comfort, author of 'The Joy of Sex'*, will be published this fall by AK Press.



**Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants**

Robin Wall Kimmerer

Milkweed Editions, 2020 [orig: 2013]

**D**on't mistake the long lifespan on bestseller lists of *Braiding Sweetgrass* as something superficial. Certainly, Kimmerer's excellent prose style attracts a broad range of readers. Yet the complexity of her ideas surely challenges those for whom nature equates to the landscape videos they capture on their smartphones.

And, it likely causes problems for those seeing Indigenous knowledge as the magic bullet rescuing them from the guilt-ridden individualism of commodity society. *Braiding Sweetgrass* is not a self-help guide, but a serious challenge to the capitalist mindset of transforming nature into self-indulgence and merchandise.

Kimmerer, a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and a botanist teaching in Syracuse, combines traditional stories and botanical research to break apart the standard Western paradigms of wilderness, especially those aspects many people approach with distaste and trepidation. The urbanite's fear of dirt takes a thorough beating with her many descriptions of what's necessary for plant and soil restoration. She digs deeply and joyfully into elements of natural life, like wetlands, amphibians, fungi, insects, algae, that most people approach with pesticides and weapons of mass eradication.

In more than thirty gems of essays, she presents dilemmas she has encountered while straddling the border between conventional science and her inherited Indigenous wisdom. Despite some complementarity, the two perspectives often clash and in some cases even baffle each other and often startle our mechanistic mindset.

**T**ake the case of the Anishinaabe word *Puhpooewee*, translated as "the force that causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight." Kimmerer recounts: "As a biologist, I was stunned that such a word existed. In all its technical vocabulary, Western science has no such term, no words to hold this mystery. You'd think that biologists, of all people, would have words for life. But in scientific language our terminology is used to define the boundaries of our knowing. What lies beyond our grasp remains unnamed."

Even well-intended science can conflict with those who observe on a daily basis what scientists only experience in an abstract or temporary way. Because

of her family's experiences of the wild, Kimmerer's botanical practice goes beyond just observing plants. Her integration of traditional wisdom with her academic research convinces her that networks of lifeforms demonstrate mutual survival, not survival of the fittest.

The friction between these two ideas should remind us of Pyotr Kropotkin's 1902 book *Mutual Aid*, in which he emphasizes the horizontal relationships among living things. Even to speak of nature as everything outside of human beings sets up a hierarchy in the world.

But Kimmerer's and Kropotkin's approaches critique the notion that only human consciousness has agency and that all other things are just passive objects buffeted around by mindless physical and chemical forces. The current trope of "being in nature," while usually referring to tourist activities, ought to be understood as our humble, reciprocal role among the countless entities with whom we share the planet.

Other recent books complement *Braiding Sweetgrass*'s description of the battle lines drawn between conventional science and a more radically holistic view of life on earth. For example, *The Hidden Life of Trees* examines the co-reliance of trees and mycelium, the underground fungi networks in forests effectively interconnecting trees and a variety of soil nutrients. Similarly, Kimmerer looks at the collegiality of plants, explaining how an amazingly agile give-and-take within the network keeps needs and abilities in balance.

**U**nsurprisingly, given Kimmerer's wider-than-botanical scope, she and her daughters spent an evening helping migrating salamanders cross a road. The salamanders' difficulties on pavement (a much less slippery medium than a leaf-embedded forest floor) expose them to road traffic. Since this evening in 2003 coincided with the invasion of Iraq, Kimmerer's head is filled with images of collateral damage: the bombed civilians and the flattened salamanders.

While the Kimmerer rescue squad pursued their tasks, they encountered a group of students studying the mortality rate of salamanders in just this situation. But the nature of their study prevented them from interfering with the salamanders' fate. Even as they built an argument for protecting the amphibians, the need for research objectivity prevented them from engaging in that very protection. Kimmerer, already knowing that the mortality was too great, put more faith in direct action than in the slow, bureaucratic process of gaining environmental legislation that would solve the problem in, or after, the long run.

Many people raised in the Western scientific tradition but who have committed themselves to support Indigenous struggles have particular difficulty with the way in which traditional peoples imbue everything with life. Most Westerners interpret this as metaphor: grandfather rocks aren't really alive; trees are not persons. But anyone wanting to read this book to its proper depth must face a gigantic hole in the fabric of the materialist science that currently dominates the globe.

Kimmerer quotes Native scholar Greg Cajete: "In Indigenous ways of knowing, we understand a thing only when we understand it with all four aspects of our being: mind, body, emotion, and spirit." At best, contemporary science can handle only the first two of these.

She goes on to explain: "I knew plants as teachers and companions to whom I was linked with mutual responsibility. . . The questions scientists raised were not 'Who are you?' but 'What is it?' No one asked plants, 'What can you tell us?' The primary question was 'How does it work?' The botany I was taught was reductionist, mechanistic, and strictly objective. Plants were reduced to objects; they were not subjects."

Here, science hypocritically retains the Judeo-Christian notion of the chosen people of God, given dominion over all, and empty of the capacity for mutuality with the rest of nature. Kimmerer argues strongly that the community of beings is not a delusion but a coherent way of existing.

The concept of gift gives us another way of appreciating this. Elaborating on Lewis Hyde's *The Gift*, Kimmerer opposes the West's reductionist, exploitative notion of nature's bounty with the gift as part of our vibrant web of reciprocity. The countless strawberries in a field near her childhood home led her to understand that "a gift comes to you through no action of your own, free, having moved toward you without your beckoning. It is not a reward; you cannot earn it, or call it to you, or even deserve it. And yet it appears. Your only role is to be open-eyed and present. Gifts exist in a realm of humility and mystery – as with random acts of kindness, we do not know their source."

This brings into sharp contrast two ideas of "fruitfulness": one a strategy to spread genes, and an entirely different one that sees it as an expression of generosity.

The first perspective, an aggressively hierarchical one, focuses on the act of a plant producing a large quantity of fruit in order to proliferate its genes. This sees natural selection as predominantly a numbers game with the most fruitful plant winning.

The second perspective considers that plants don't behave this way merely for the delayed gratification of gene survival. Rather, the actual experience of abundance is fulfilling in itself. The multiplicity of fruit nourishes a community of living things, from microbes, within the plants, fruit, and soil, to grazing mammals. This creates not just a reciprocity of nutrients, but a relationship that cannot be measured empirically.

The first perspective opposes collectivity. It suppresses cooperation as an unprofitable exchange, an embarrassing weakness. Can you imagine babies depersonalizing their mothers as nothing more than instruments they exploit on their way to a highly individualized adulthood? Our millennia-old trajectory toward the total domination of nature points to such nightmares.

The generosity perspective requires shedding the certainty that plants are single-tasked machines, programmed only to cast their genes into the future. It also means exploring how non-human entities (all of them, even microbes) knowingly experience relationships with others, and seek enjoyment in those relationships.

In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, the critique of scientific reductionism and materialism provides us with the opportunity to escape the quagmire many anarchists share with Marxists—the notion of progress, especially evolutionary progress, and productivity, progress's associated fetish.

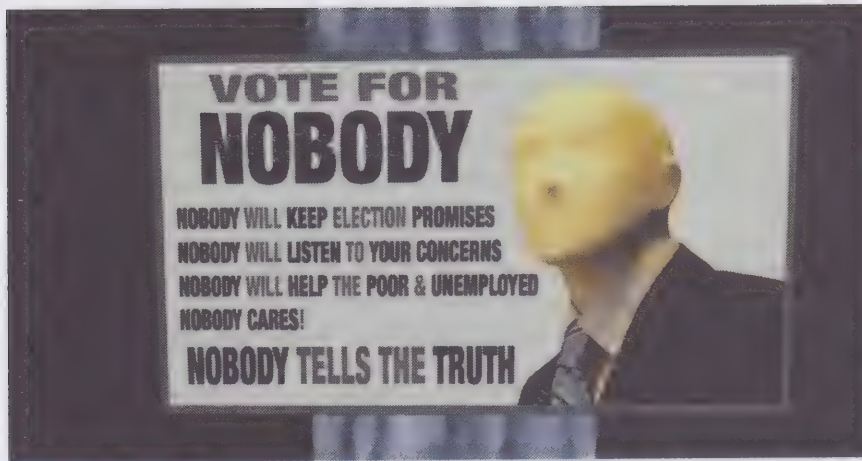
Marxism holds as a fundamental belief that we can only achieve true communism by progressing through the capitalist development of productive forces, a strategy that can't be promoted without worsening the exploitation of the natural world. Marx's particular reading of Darwin's theories reinforced this economic idea, and Marxists have continued to bind their economic theory with their ideas on science and technology.

Increasingly, many anarchists and others resist capital's regimentation of labor for the sake of productivity. Instead, favor building communities integrated into their environments, where quality of collective experience overrides quantity in the production of commodities.

In confronting the damages of contemporary society, this gives us a head start towards imagining solutions based on their long-understood values of community, sustainability, and harmony.

And, the shoulders on whom we ought to stand in order to extend that vision, belong to elders like those we encounter in *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

Steve Izma is a typographer and computer programmer in Kitchener, Ontario.



# Anarchism & the Vote

Abstention from voting is a fundamental anarchist principle. Does it remain an absolute today?

KATHY E. FERGUSON

**E**mma Goldman is reputed to have said, “If voting could change things, they’d make it illegal.” Contempt for the franchise permeates anarchism, so that anarchists who favor participating in state elections are both in the minority and on the defensive.

This essay places the struggle for Votes for Women in the context of anarchist aspirations for radical social transformation, and also reconsiders the anarchist rejection of voting in contemporary times. A century after “The Great Reform,” I suggest we reformulate Goldman’s logic: perhaps authorities try so hard to make voting illegal because it could actually change things.

## ANARCHIST FEMINISM DURING THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

While Goldman and her comrades rejected women’s suffrage in favor of revolutionary anarchism, they also put aside their differences about the vote to create coalitions around other issues. Anarchist women worked with suffrage reformers on specific campaigns, including fighting for birth control, organizing against World War I, and working to free political prisoners.

Suffrage was a large and diverse movement, not an existing right for women. The decision that anarchist women faced, and unanimously answered in the negative, was whether they should work to acquire the vote, not simply whether they should cast a ballot. English anarchist Rose Witcop expressed the common position: she wrote in *Voice of Labor* that she admired suffragists’ bravery but denied that parliamentary reform could help working people. Anarchist women took pains to distinguish themselves from patriarchal opponents of women’s suffrage. Goldman saw herself as a better feminist, a more radical feminist, than the suffragists. In a letter from prison to her niece Stella Ballantine on April 3, 1919, Goldman characterized her own feminism as “a broader and deep[er] point [of

view]” than the suffragists who fixated on the vote and neglected the social question.

Anarchist women were also quick to ridicule claims that women would purify government and clean up its excesses, a task Goldman joked would take “supernatural powers.” Anarchist women were generally incensed by notions that chastity and moral virtue were the realm of women, seeing purity as merely the flip side of vice and “bad women” as the needed patriarchal double of “good women.”

British anarchist Dora Marsden mocked “pure” women for being more fascinated with vice than the sinners themselves: “The vicious amuse themselves by imagining and thereafter ‘touching’; the ‘pure’ prolong the excitement by imagining and thereafter refraining. Fundamentally, there is nothing to choose between them.”

Drawing upon British anarchist Paddy Vison’s overview of anarchist objections to voting, I see four major, overlapping arguments framing anarchist women’s views of suffrage:

The bottom line is that suffrage won’t work: it won’t achieve a free and just society. Quoting Thoreau, Goldman declared, “Even voting for the right thing is doing nothing for it.” Governmental democracy is merely a façade for the real power of the owning class. The only real leverage that working people have is their labor power.

The limited effectiveness of suffrage is made more nefarious by the duplicity of the electoral process. The game is rigged. Chicago anarchist Lucy Parsons insists that our duly elected representatives, anchored to the interests of the wealthy, are actually “corruptionists playing their tricks.” People of integrity might resist corruption, Goldman argued, but would still be “helpless to exert the slightest influence on behalf of labor.”

The third point has to do with the legitimacy of representation. Even if the election process were scrupulously honest, anarchists remain convinced that

representative government is itself anti-democratic. Only direct democracy is real democracy: workers should control their workplaces; students and teachers should control their schools; children and adults should have equal power and status in families. Suffrage does the work of legitimization on a very personal level: voting legitimizes the system of representative government by habituating us to the state. Even if we go into the voting booth skeptical about the system, the act of voting, the process of learning about the candidates and the issues, following the results, discussing them with others – these are not without consequence. They prepare us to tacitly accept the authority structures rather than to challenge them.

The fourth objection to suffrage, from an anarchist perspective, is the cost in time and attention needed to educate oneself about issues and cast a ballot. Anarchists have typically insisted that we should better spend our time on actions that hold greater promise to change the world. Suffrage struggles siphon precious political energy into dead-end campaigns. This was one of the strongest concerns of the anarchist women 100 years ago, because most of them were full-time activists in the anarchist movement. The suffrage movement was a competitor for activists' limited resources.

#### REVISITING VOTING TODAY

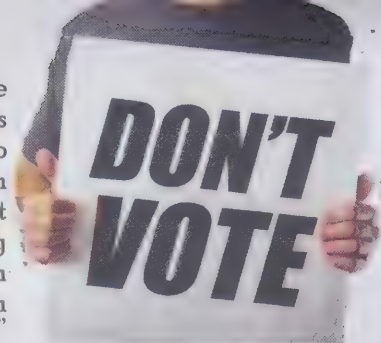
Where does this leave us, today? Taking seriously anarchist convictions that voting in representative democracies is a crooked system that protects capitalism, robs us of our desire for true self government, and may distract us from more important struggles, what is left to say about anarchism and voting?

Given that last century's anarchists were reacting to the suffrage movement rather than to a relatively settled state institution, contemporary questions about whether anarchists should vote today are in a different context than earlier questions about whether anarchist women should work for the vote. Today's authorities often go to great lengths to discourage voting, particularly by youth, people of color, and ex-felons, so it behooves anarchists to ask why. Perhaps their alarm should be our incentive.

The few anarchists who have defended voting have often done so on the grounds that it can offer a small step in the direction of needed change. Contemporary British anarchist Paddy Vipond calls voting "the easiest tool to utilize in the anarchist arsenal" in order to take "a small step in the right direction."

Yet, what does it mean, politically, to take a step? The step image suggests progression toward a shared goal, but with a smaller stride. Yet anarchists are virtually unanimous that anarchy is a practice that rises up out of grassroots self-organizing. It cannot be created from the top, down. Anarchists give enormous energy to creating local, grassroots initiatives, including bookstores, cafes, publications, theaters, art venues,

Voting in state elections offers not a step toward anarchism but a chance at what contemporary anarchist Ryan Conrad calls "harm reduction"



and autonomous communities, because anarchy emerges out of shared organizing. Perhaps a better metaphor for voting is not a small step toward a distant radical goal but a posture of defense: defending ourselves against the worst options by voting for the less-bad options. This is more like an act of self-preservation than it is like taking a step down a shared road.

By this view, voting in state elections offers not a step toward anarchism but a chance at what contemporary anarchist Ryan Conrad calls "harm reduction": we want to stop the worst from happening. To expect this strategy to actually lead, even by a small increment, to an anarchist society is unreasonable.

That's not what voting in governmental elections is capable of doing, for exactly the reasons anarchists lay out. But if we see voting as minimizing the damage inflicted by the state, it becomes more like hiring a lawyer to defend oneself in court, or marrying to acquire a passport.

Anarchists have regularly accepted (not without objection) both of these strategies: Goldman married British coal miner James Colton to get a British passport, and she regularly secured the services of her friend and lawyer Harry Weinberger in numerous court battles. Voters often moan that they are tired of selecting from the lesser of evils, but I am suggesting that, in light of anarchists' trenchant critique of suffrage, choosing the lesser of evils is exactly what we should do.

Reflecting on the lessons she learned in her life, Goldman stated in her autobiography that one cannot "remain on earth without making compromises." Taking the anarchist view of suffrage seriously, I suggest, means accepting that we will never achieve a just society through the ballot box. It also means accepting that engaging electoral politics has risks: we risk legitimating the system, jeopardizing our own political identity, and neglecting more radical agendas. Goldman and most of her comrades found these limitations unacceptable. But 100 years later, I take more guidance from Goldman's conclusion that compromise is unavoidable.

In grave times, we need to work against the worst threats however we can. Even through voting.

Kathy E. Ferguson is Professor of Political Science and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and the author of several books including *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets*. Her latest is *Letterpress Revolution: The Politics of Anarchist Print Culture* (Duke University Press, 2023).



"Zoo" —Jennifer Gariepy and Maurice Greenia, 2023

Exploring the Crossroads of Two Radical Pathways

## An Open Entrance to the Shut Palace of Anarcho-Surrealism

**Surrealism and Anarchism**

Pietro Ferrua, edited by Ron Sakolsky  
Eberhardt Press, 2022.

DAVID TIGHE

**R**on Sakolsky has uncovered a previously lost piece of anarchist history, one that explores the fertile crossroads of surrealism and anarchy.

This text originated as a 1982 lecture given by Pietro Ferrua (1930–2021), inaugurating the Anarchos Institute at the University of Montreal. The pamphlet provides a useful biographical sketch of Ferrua that helps situate his scholarship within a lifelong commitment to anarchism.

In his youth, Ferrua was a runner for the Italian resistance during World War II, and after the war co-founded the Alba dei Liberi anarchist group in San Remo, his birthplace in northwestern Italy. Anarchist agitation and refusal of military conscription led to his imprisonment from 1950–52.

He edited an anarchist paper in Italy and then several

publications in Switzerland. There, he founded the International Centre for Research on Anarchism (CIRA) in 1957, an international archive of anarchist material which continues to this day.

In 1963, Ferrua was chased out of Switzerland for anarchist activities and moved to Brazil where he was active in anarchist agitation in opposition to the dictatorship. He was expelled in 1969 and relocated to Portland, Ore. He taught at Lewis and Clark University from 1970 to 1987 in the foreign languages, comparative literature, and film history department. He studied Lettrism and Surrealism, anarchism and cinema, anarchist painters, and anarchists in the Mexican revolution.

In 1992, he coedited a still untranslated French-language anthology, *Surrealism and Anarchism: I'm Still Left Wondering*. Sakolsky came across Ferrua's work while doing research for his recent book, *Dreams of Anarchy and the Anarchy of Dreams: Adventures at the Crossroads of Anarchy and Surrealism* published by Autonomedia in 2021. The discovery that Ferrua was still living in Portland led first to correspondence, and then to a meeting along with Eberhardt Press's Charles Oberbeck, and Canadian Surrealist Sheila Nopper.

Ferrua died in 2021 at the age of 91, just before *Dreams of Anarchy* was completed. The publication of Sakolsky's pioneering work on Anarcho-Surrealist history stands as a tribute to Ferrua—scholar and anarchist militant.

Ferrua's *Surrealism and Anarchism* examines the 15-month long collaboration between the Paris Surrealist Group and *La Libertaire*, the weekly paper of the French Anarchist Federation. This alliance was announced with a manifesto published on October 12, 1951, entitled "Surrealism and Anarchism: Opening Statement" which is included in the pamphlet.

The statement begins, "Surrealists have never ceased to assert that the execrable trinity of state-work-religion has often led us to encounter the comrades of the Anarchist Federation. Today we express this unity in *La Libertaire*. We are pleased that this collaboration will release a common force with a revolutionary spirit."

While some of the less imaginative or more doctrinaire members of the Anarchist Federation may have seen this involvement of the Surrealists as strange, Ferrua argues that it represented a fundamental affinity between the two movements. He bemoans the silence of historians of Surrealism regarding this specific collaboration, and the Surrealist affinity for anarchism in general—a silence that continued for the most part until recently.

Despite a relatively short time frame, nearly all the Surrealists in France appeared in the pages of *La Libertaire*. Ferrua lists 54 by name. Alongside many shorter pieces, there were several very significant essays that appeared during that period.

One example is Jean Schuster's "Dreams and Revolution,"

which Ferrua sees as a precursor in many ways to the anarcho-surrealist influence during May 1968 revolt in Paris. Another essay singled out is Benjamin Peret's "Imperialism and Nationalism."

Perhaps the most important was Andre Breton's "The Lighthouse," which Ferrua characterizes as Breton's "declaration of love to the anarchists." In it, Breton explores his own lifelong affinities for anarchism, but also the anarchist roots of surrealism.

He writes: "Surrealism, long before it was called surrealism, when it was still only a free association of individuals who spontaneously rejected the totality of the social and moral constraints of their time, was first a reflection in the black mirror of anarchism."

Breton has often been criticized for his onetime alliance with the French Communist Party and later friendship with Leon Trotsky. Historians have used these associations as an excuse to minimize or omit Breton's solidarity with anarchists. Fundamentally, for Breton, a surrealist world and an anarchist world are identical. Ferrua quotes Breton to drive that point home: "the surrealists were convinced that a so-

cial revolution which would spread to every country could not fail to promote a libertarian world (some say a surrealist world, but it is the same thing)."

Ferrua ends his discussion by briefly touching on "later anarcho-surrealist relations" of which there are many. Happily, several people have followed up on Ferrua's work and greatly expanded on it. Ron Sakolsky's *Dreams of Anarchy* explores these later relations in great detail. Recent work by Abigail Susik is exemplary as well, among many others.

Sakolsky characterizes Surrealism as seeking "a rupture with the impoverished vision of what passes for reality by actively questioning, critiquing, and joyously upsetting the notion of what is deemed 'realistically' possible."

Many anarchists are seeking this rupture as well, and they would do well to investigate these same crossroads that Ferrua was exploring four decades ago. This brief 50-page pamphlet is a great place to start looking.

David Tighe is an anarchist, mail artist, and zine maker living in Alberta, Canada.

## Surrealist Collectivity: A Utopian Rhizome

STEVEN CLINE

*"Surrealism is the collective experience of individualism"*  
—André Masson

**W**hat is surrealist collectivity? A mutually opened wound, ever seeded by poetry, by revolt. A soft spectral voice in the darkness, urging all nonconformists to come out, and to play. An extradimensional vehicle for thought and action beyond all controls, a device powered by collective vulnerability and individual Becoming.

Yes, on this endlessly metamorphosing playing field, a strange new kind of "individualist collectivity" takes root, communication with the Other becomes unclouded, raw. It is a subterranean, oft-missed aspect of the surrealist move-



ment. But it is also what stands at its deepest center.

A surrealist group—some-where in between terrorist cell, and occult secret society, perhaps? It is the group atmosphere which is contagious above all, however. The atmosphere, before even the ideas. Because if ideology trumps atmosphere, if the collective organism wears an anarchist skin, but has a heart that beats Empire, well, then it's DOA; it's a con.

What does the surrealist organism want for? Utter openness, to every line of flight! Impenetrable psychic walls, to every command for utilitarian conformism! Regardless of whatever pragmatic choices an individual may

make "on the outside", within the magick bounds of this sacred utopian circle a limitless non-utilitarianism must reign. Surrealist collectivity is an irresistible call to get lost, to drift, to remake everything both inside and outside, once again. Restrictions on this fungal network's scope will eternally be rejected, she won't have it, no no. All horizons must remain open, all possibilities must be played with and explored. Sur-

realist collective = boiling tomato soup, gone hot, hot, hotter! One drink from just such a soup, and, AH! One feels the widening of calcified veins, one feels the evaporation of lazy is-what-it-is-ism. Intensified in just such an alchemical atmosphere, the individual expands beyond their own bounds, they can level up, RPG style. And, that consensus reality, well, it jus' won't know what hit 'em!

Unlike religion or political parties however, a surrealist collective does not function under the process of copy/paste logic, it does not work towards the cloning of the thousand toy soldiers, all one, all the same. No, in a truly surrealist collective, each person intensifies, grows, and modifies this collective stew before them, irreparably.

All SurCooks are both separate and conjoined, both fierce individualists and somnambulant hive-bees, all at the same time. And the SurGroup's tendrils are ever-expanding, eternally searching—for Exit. Exit, from Empire. From that Das-Kapital Demiurge. And, we meet deep within eachOther's widening eye, meet deep within eachOther's jittering mind-heart, and we all know why we are here.

No, André Breton did not actually crown himself pope and goalie, in point of fact. No, it was that Collective Rhizome which kicked all sellouts to the curb. Or, a more hands-off approach often being preferred, just observed as they drifted casually away from their ideals into the waiting capitalist void, mere lambs to a self-chosen slaughter.

A tradition, too? A shifting, evolving network of connections, across space and time? A glistening shadow of uncompromising revolt, passed from individual to individual? Yes. A buoyant open-door'd ontology, basically, or to put it 'nother way, a much tastier, farm fresh reality tunnel? A reality tunnel which expands instead of contracting over time, like a giggling Clown's balloon? Yes. But not a dogma. Not a commandment. Not a creed.

This is an account here of my experiences with surrealist collectivity. But similar atmospheres have cast their shadow cross many places, times. Under numerous banners. And will continue to do so. So why not log off, dear reader? Why not chase this offline-only rhizomatic high?

The proof is in the pudding. Where these shadows fall, earthquakes are always sure to follow.

*The forest around it keeps changing and there are no set coordinates to say certainly in which direction we are actually moving, but we keep breaking through layers of illusions, we keep making the company of ever new flocks of never-before-seen birds, who recognise their reflection in the gleaming skin of the vehicle just as much as the vehicle recognises itself in the diabolic fire of these birds' eyes. —Mattias Forshage*

Steven Cline co-edits the journal *Peculiar Mormyrid* and participates in an Atlanta surrealist group. [stevenclineart.com](http://stevenclineart.com)



## The Revolt of Women in Horror Flicks

**Stepford Daughters: Weapons for Feminists in Contemporary Horror**

Johanna Isaacson  
Common Notions 2022

**JESS FLARITY**

**J**ohanna Isaacson, a professor of English at Modesto Junior College, presents a thought-provoking and exhaustively researched addition to contemporary horror criticism in *Stepford Daughters*.

The book will be useful to any graduate students working with feminism, film, and popular culture, though anyone looking for interpretations of modern horror movies with an emphasis on queerness and womanhood will find it an engaging read.

Isaacson covers a wide range of movies throughout her 187-page analysis, including American blockbusters like *Hereditary* (2018) and *Get Out* (2017), while also offering insights into lesser-known international works, such as the original *Dark Water* from Japan (2002), as well as the Polish film *The Lure* (2015).

The use of the term *Stepford Daughters* is integral to the main thesis of the project, which is to offer new ways of

looking at horror after *The Stepford Wives* (1975), by analyzing female or genderqueer characters as daughters who rebel against patriarchal forces rather than continue the cycle of objectification under the male gaze.

Isaacson skips past the 1980s and 1990s, as these decades of teenage slasher films like *Friday the Thirteenth* (1980) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) offer little fertile ground for feminists, and instead focuses on movies after the mid-2000s, though the book is organized by subject area rather than chronologically.

Her approach is influenced by Marxism, and includes four chapters focused on domestic spaces, unfair wages, service and emotional labor, and finally, teenagers who face an uncertain future. While the Fifth Estate is critical of Marxism as a belief system, Isaacson avoids soapboxing and uses Marxist theories to deconstruct capitalism and traditions related to male dominance, making her work still useful for anarchists or anyone else who wants to disrupt the current status quo.

Isaacson begins her introduction with a fierce attack on “lean in” feminism, a concept created by a Facebook executive in 2013 which basically states that women need to become complicit in the machinery of capitalism in order to obtain personal power or monetary success.

This position has also been critiqued by many others, with bell hooks going so far as to call it “faux feminism,” so Isaacson invents her own term to invoke the opposite sentiment, what she calls *lean out* feminism.

Lean out feminism invites the viewer of these horror movies to realize that the systemic problems of capitalism and gender inequality are so intertwined that “social injustice cannot be dismantled by a single person,” thus a wider lens is necessary for seeing these issues in their totality. We must *lean out* to see the bigger picture beyond the individual.

Throughout the next four chapters, Isaacson uses a formulaic approach that helps frame each of the movies through a series of specific points of analysis. She states why a film fits with the chapter’s theme, provides a brief synopsis of the plot that is rife with spoilers, and then brings in the writing of contemporary feminist/anti-capitalist thinkers to further prove how everything fits with her *lean out* philosophy.

For example, she interprets the Australian movie *The Babadook* (2014) as a critique on the idea that women’s reproductive labor is a “free and spontaneous resource,” as evidenced by the main character Amelia’s struggles as a single mother. She uses Melinda Cooper’s criticism of contemporary family values along with Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed’s notions of “the power of abjection” to prove how female flesh in the film is viewed as inherently lustful, carnal, or filthy.

Isaacson then adds a section on queer discourse, consid-

ering how the Babadook monster (or any monster) is also a representation of queerness, and the relation of monstrosity/queerness will continue as a secondary theme throughout her other analyses. With over twenty different movies viewed under this scrutinizing lens, both casual moviegoers and avid horror junkies can find something that interests them.

A minor weakness is that the book does not contain an appendix, and considering how thorough Isaacson is in covering as many feminist philosophers as possible, this may lead some of her readers to hunt around after finishing it, searching for that section where she mentions Jack Halberstam, Sarah Ahmed, or Luce Irigaray.

However, there is another major issue that I found myself grasping at throughout the text. I could not locate the *weapons* that are mentioned in the subtitle, *Weapons for Feminists in Contemporary Horror*. Isaacson mentions briefly near the final pages, “The most important weapons offered in this book have nothing to do with watching movies. Rather, they are weapons of defense against the gas-lighting forces that would frame our most beautiful gestures as monstrous. In becoming monster[s], we consider what reproductive labor might look like if we did it for ourselves.”

This statement brings to mind not a weapon, but a *tool*—such as a mirror—as Isaacson points out with great success that these horror movies can be useful in forcing the male gaze to self-reflect on its own destructive tendencies.

The notion of using weapons remains a problematic area for feminists, as to engage in any form of violence conflicts directly with many core values related to its principles. There’s a breakdown in language here not unlike that between the heptapod aliens and the humans in the science fiction film *Arrival* (2016) related to the terms *weapon/tool*, as the writer Charlotte Shane points out in the essay, “No Wave Feminism,” in *Can We All Be Feminists?*

Feminism itself is a practice, a tool, a weapon, an insight.

Perhaps Isaacson is right to call each of her precise points of analysis a weapon. After all, a hammer is a tool if you’re pounding nails, but not necessarily when you’re smashing skulls.

However, unlike the work of anarchists like Peter Gelderloos, this book is not an active guide for how to disrupt patriarchal, authoritative forces, and exists more as a series of doorways into how contemporary horror films can offer explanations or alternatives for women living under the real-life terrors of gender inequality and masculine dominance.

Still, I would have liked the book even more if it had practical application and less analysis—and some razor blades hidden between the pages.

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WILLIAM R. BOYER

**P**rolific Canadian music journalist Martin Popoff has written a remarkably exhaustive, song-by-song exhumation of the Clash, the astonishing rock and roll group (1976-1986) once popularly dubbed, “The only band that matters.”

The meticulous, chronological study examines five singles and six full-length albums, including one double-LP (*London Calling*) and one triple-disc (*Sandinista!*).

Even non-Clash fans may marvel at Popoff’s painstaking research, including the historical connections to such diverse influences as Woody Guthrie, Lee “Scratch” Perry, the Kinks, and the Sex Pistols.

The methodical, briskly-paced prose presents a convincing appraisal of probably the most influential protest music in the history of pop culture. The Clash’s raucous, expansive sonic assaults and unashamedly political verse are fully dissected, with digressions of trivia that oddly amplify a fascinating collision of revolutionary art, one in constant conflict and creativity. It’s as if Popoff is carefully documenting an anthropological time-capsule for future civilizations.

He also begins unpacking some unresolvable contradictions by the fourth Clash track (and first single), the dubiously named *White Riot*, sparked by their witnessing of the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival riot in West London, where police violently harassed Black youth. The paradox underscores this exhilarating band, this peculiar book, and the subtle intellect of their manically driven front-man, the late Joe Strummer, in their meteoric rise to unusual fame.

*Black man gotta lot a problems  
But they don't mind throwing a brick  
White people go to school  
Where they teach you how to be thick*

The author unearths plenty of solid gold for even the most die-hard Clash fanatics like me in this deep dive discography. I never knew, for instance, how one of their most haunting songs, “Up in Heaven (Not

## What are we going to do now?



**The Clash: All the Albums, All the Songs**  
Martin Popoff  
PM Press,  
2022

Only Here),” ends with a repeated refrain unashamedly lifted from an obscure Phil Ochs song, “United Fruit.” Strummer’s plaintive wailing understates his taking of the baton from the muckraking folk music of Ochs.

Of course, the Clash were not the only band that mattered. Many subsequent groups known for expressing similar social urgency have noted the Clash as a major influence. As Clash-inspired protest rocker Billy Bragg recently mused on stage in Detroit, music cannot change the world, but it sure can help inspire you to change it.

Still, all this confessional documentation inadvertently triggers some nagging questions:

Can art offer sustainable meaning when we are now all so saturated with screen stimuli?  
Can any of this agitprop change anything?  
Does rock ‘n’ roll still matter?

Despite Popoff’s meticulous insight into the Clash, he generally sidesteps the agitation potential of the music for social upheaval. This oversight should not discourage readers and audiophiles to reconsider how art, literature, and music periodically influences some major political transformations and whether it ever will again.

For example, time-travel back to the origins of the American Civil War. One will uncover Harriet Beecher Stowe’s controversial 1852 anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, as the second best-selling book of the entire 1800s (behind only that other work of fiction, the Bible). While fueling activists in the north and infuriating slavers in the south, more militant abolitionists like John Brown would claim Stowe’s work a poor substitute for failed action against ending slavery.

Even as Abraham Lincoln half-jokingly blames Stowe for inciting the conflict, Brown’s shocking yet failed raid on the arsenal at Harpers Ferry (with the resulting execution of him and his captured insurgents) ultimately ignites the bloodiest war in this hemisphere along with more incendiary art and commentary.

# The vigilantly **anti-war Strummer** openly **wept** upon first hearing how disturbingly **his lyrics** had been **exploited** by American bomber **pilots** in Iraq.

Internationally known writers Victor Hugo, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman and most significantly, Frederick Douglass, all vehemently protested Brown's hanging.

Still, it's the dedicatory marching song, "John Brown's Body," morphing into the most common rallying cry for all union troops, both white and Black, singing in unison throughout the war and into the early civil rights movement. Here, an omnipresent anthem, prototype protest music, directly aided the war against slavery.

Another instance of art stirring actual revolutionary action surfaces a century later in poet André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto*, with Breton's timely speaking tour to Haiti in late 1945. According to Michael Löwy, emeritus research director at the National Center for Scientific Research, Breton unexpectedly helps instigate an overthrow of at least one repressive Haitian regime which seized most copies of the *La Ruche* "Revolutionary Papers" that had published Breton's anti-colonial speeches.

**A**s anarchist French philosopher Jacques Ellul explained in *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (1965), there are crucial distinctions between agitation propaganda, where the objective is to incite frustrated humans to decisive action and integration propaganda, where the goal is to better assimilate people as consumers into the needs of the market. If we march back to the Clash, their attempts at agitprop, largely subsidized by CBS, their major corporate recording label, epitomize many of these crucial complications.

For example, did the December 1979 reggae call-to-action wrath in "Guns of Brixton," from the momentous *London Calling* LP help provoke or merely predict the April 1981 Brixton riots in South London between angry, lower class, mostly Black youth and rampaging police?

Or, examine their only top ten hit, the danceable and easily recognizable single, "Rock the Casbah." As Popoff explains, the band intended the satire as hard-hitting humor against an Iranian ban on western music. Sadly, the ubiquitous track became both a piped-in U.S. combat soundtrack and soldier graffiti scrawled on bombs during the 1991 invasion of Iraq. The vigilantly anti-war Strummer openly wept upon first hearing how disturbingly his lyrics had been exploited.

It's a critical detail foreshadowing the limits of revolutionary rock in even the pre-internet era.

My own daily audio nutrition with the Clash didn't just

sate, it galvanized. It powered my exit from the confines of Marxist-leaning academia to the more activist, anti-authoritarian Detroit underground, and inspiringly, the Fifth Estate milieu and my own protest music with my band, The Blanks.

During the 1980s, Detroit Cass Corridor punk rock events, packed with animated, mostly white suburbanite exiles, noted such informal conversions as hardly isolated fashion. A local alternative band might rock a Clash cut mixed with topical originals at a fundraiser for the local Evergreen Alliance fighting the world's largest trash incinerator, with a related on-site lit table publicizing a demonstration the next weekend, and so on.

Simply put, the dedicated protest rock seemed to be feeding a movement, not just a moment.

In 1982, meeting the Clash for the first time backstage (Strummer famously welcomed fan access after any show), I shared my intentions of dropping out of college, getting more involved in anti-nuke activism, but before I could finish my rambling confession, Strummer simply asked, "What's the name of your band?"

Now the question might only be, "What's your website? Your Twitter handle?"

*You grow up  
And you calm down  
Working for the Clampdown*

**I**n December 22, 2002, after enjoying three years in an ever-developing and gratifying band project, the Mescaleros, Strummer died suddenly at 50 from an undiagnosed heart defect. In just a couple of months, the Clash were scheduled to reunite in a long anticipated live reunion with their induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Strummer's sudden passing predated the Internet's radical transformation of how music would be consumed and absorbed into a screen-dominated culture, i.e., integration propaganda. We can infer Strummer would likely be unimpressed with the overwhelming dominance of the Cloud, where the vast sea of available music is so often reduced to web visits and video Likes.

Would Strummer just have shrugged when one Clash track, "Straight to Hell," gets sampled by Sri Lankan rapper M.I.A. into her biggest global hit, "Paper Planes?" Her hypnotically rhythmic Clash-based satire of American anti-immigrant fears has reached over 246 million YouTube views.

To quote the Clash, from: "White Man in Hammersmith Palais:"

»»»»»»



*The new groups are not concerned  
With what there is to be learned  
They got Burton suits  
Ha, they think it's funny  
Turning rebellion into money.*

Even less impressive, the dominance of corporate-controlled streaming audio, with its force-feeding algorithms of supposedly similar songs from millions of choices down to a precious few hundred.

On Spotify, with its over 456 million users, only about four percent of the 95 percent available songs are ever streamed, with 20 percent of the catalog never streamed even once.

With apologies to decades of passionate dedication to topical singer/songwriters like David Rovics, here are some unsettling conclusions:

- 1) Recent social movements like Black Lives Matter relied little on music spreading the word.
- 2) Everyone's expressing, but very few are inspiring.
- 3) Music no longer matters so much.

*The Clash: All the Albums, All the Songs* forces Popoff to paint himself into a miserable chronological corner with the final universally panned release, *Cut the Crap*.

Disowned by Strummer and anyone connected with the half-baked project, except for their blubbing manager, Bernie Rhodes, Popoff rightly dismisses the throwaway last song ("Life is Wild") as a "collapse in a dogpile of noise."

The ambitious book then ends abruptly, as if the Clash fought the law and the law won (a long-time favorite Clash cover), and the clampdown threw away the key.

William R. Boyer still loiters around an urban high school classroom in the Detroit area, his union HQ, and his weekly Substack column at [williamrboyer.substack.com/publish](http://williamrboyer.substack.com/publish)



## Meet The Commander

*An excerpt from the unpublished novel, "Don't take too much sunlight for yourself"*

**RICO CLEFFI**

**R**nching his way downtown, he hits the first food cart he can find, not an easy feat in this neighborhood. The cart stands in front of a worn old church converted into a disco, famous for getting shut down repeatedly. He devours a stale, greasy, half-cooked knish.

Across the street from the cart, appearing as a mirage, a bookshop. Real fringe spot. Rollie has been inside a few times over the years. He generally avoids that sort of place, owing to the aspects of their ideology he finds offensive. But none of that matters. Now, it is raining. Now, he needs to use the bathroom. Good reasons to enter a place as any.

Black posters in the window announce in vitriolic type font: *Communism, why it requires proper leadership. Come see this DVD of a talk given by New Emancipation Party for Workers Revolution Commander Stan Weckyl. Commander Stan is indisputably the true interpreter of Marx/Engels/Lenin/Mao/Hoxha Thought (MLMH™). The New Emancipation Party for Workers Revolution is an Amerikkkan-based organization that has its eyes set on taking power in the US.*

Rollie wonders if they hadn't drawn the attention of the cops with that one. A bearded man, a determined, peeved-looking gaze squints out from the poster. Must be Commander Stan. Had to be an old photo, possibly decades old. Rollie ventures inside. A scruffy older man wearing a "Mao's the time" T-shirt talks on the phone. Rollie browses the book titles. One wall has multiple shelves stocked with nothing but the writings of Commander Stan.

What would life be like under the leadership of this Commander guy, under his lackeys? Rollie has had it with bosses. He is tired of being told what is in his best

interest. How stifling would the days be under these guys? No alternative in what they are offering.

If he hadn't had such a distinct distrust of authority, maybe this Commander Stan stuff would've appealed to him. Far as he is concerned, the Commander and his ilk are selling something he doesn't need. He doesn't want a new commander, or boss, landlord, or self-help guru.

On the back wall, another photo of the Great Leader, this one much larger. Looking at the portrait, Rollie feels frozen, helpless. The commander has this bland intangibility about him. He doesn't exude any particular charisma. Still, Rollie is transfixed by this avuncular dictator in search of a cult. None of the books hold much appeal for him. Probably not much appeal for anybody. Countless Mao speeches. *Comrade Stan Speaks*, *The Selected Speeches of Chairman Hoxha*, that sort of thing.

Under a sign marked: "Classics," an entire shelf of Mao's Little Red Book, a larger shelf of Commander Stan titles underneath. Official our-great-leader shit by the bushel. Rollie doesn't feel so comfortable browsing, anyway. He was going to ask to use the bathroom, but the place is making him paranoid. Every inch of the joint has got to be surveilled. If not by the cops, perhaps by a rival faction's henchmen. Maybe they film you for possible extortion fodder, eyes peeping out of the Commander's portrait above the toilet. Smile for the Commander Stan Toilet Cam.

"We're having a showing of a talk Stan Weckyl gave next week." Man from the counter speaking. Rollie, pondering the impossibility of the sentence the guy just uttered, must have looked like easy prey, staring at the Commander's portrait, biting his lip. "We have several of his writings...", he continues. Rollie has a hard-time focusing on the words; he's still drawn to the photo.

"We're focusing on reaching people who know that there's no difference at all between the candidates. We know that they're both part of an imperialist racket, and we're connecting with people everywhere, like you, who know it, people who are tired of the way things are." Trying to cram as much of his script in as he could, the guy appears satisfied with his delivery. He doesn't seem to care whether Rollie is listening or not. Rollie must be giving just enough uncomfortable nods for the man to keep delivering his lines. He wonders if he has scripted rebuttals prepared, the way telemarketers do.

"Commander Stan's such a charismatic character, he used to be in advertising. He could be successful at anything he wants, but he chose revolution. We're really redefining our brand identity. This is such an exciting time for people



like yourself to get involved. To actually have your voice heard."

The guy ducks behind a curtain. Now, Rollie can leave.

Not so fast. Crisp applause fills the room. The continued applause has that same reverberating crackle found on many of old live records.

"Sound of a bygone era.

"I'll just play you some excerpts from the lecture, to give you a taste. We're selling copies of the DVD for \$35."

"I'm kinda cleaned out right now," Rollie says.

"Thank you. Ahem. As I was saying before the break..." The Commander has a slightly affected tough accent, fictional waterfront Brooklynese, the kind you hear in old movies. This has got to be a farce. The entire thing sounds like it was recorded in a past that never took place. And that applause. Rollie has heard it before. He racks his brain to try and place it. "Live at Budokan," maybe? "Frampton Comes Alive?"

"...Jive-ass CP members can't get down with our new formulation. Uhh-hunnh. Anarchists throwing bricks through the windows of Nike Town can't get down with this, no. Imagine the productive capacity that could be harnessed if we controlled Nike. We could fly the red flag over Nike Town, baby!" Commander Stan almost rapped.

The counter guy now preoccupied with some French tourists who had wandered in, presumably to get out of the rain. Rollie figures much of the foot traffic they're getting is probably due to the weather. Next to what looks like a death mask of the Great Leader, an abundant supply of red umbrellas, bearing Mao's face, with the text, "Mao we're talking." Strategically displayed by the door. Rollie makes a dash for it. "Care to buy a paper before you leave?" The counterman holding up a newspaper, the headline blaring, type redder than the blood of a dozen martyrs.

"Next time."

"Don't forget, the film next Thursday—also if you have any friends, or coworkers, who might *also* be interested in a revolution, but might not feel it's possible—"

He continues, but Rollie is long gone by then.

Rico Cleffi writes from Brooklyn. *Don't take too much sunlight for yourself* is his first novel, which will hopefully be published in the near future. Set against the bleakness of the early Bush years, *Don't Take* is an anarchist tale of bibliomania that deals with book collecting and book burning, and the struggle to assert one's dignity in a world that grinds the life out of anything living."

**Divine Blue Light: for John Coltrane**  
Will Alexander  
City Light Books, 2022

## ROBERT KNOX

Will Alexander's latest poems, collected in *Divine Blue Light: for John Coltrane*, "remain (in the author's own prefatory words) parallels to nanograms as dazzling wattage."

A nanogram, a billionth of a gram, is light on its feet, and

the poet is asking the reader to be similarly nimble in responding to his lines, images, and appropriations of vocabulary from the sciences, mathematics, and non-Western dialects.

A Pulitzer Prize finalist for a previous collection, Alexander's new book is described by his publisher City Lights Books as "a kinetic explosion of language that emanates from the intersection between surrealism and afro-futurism where (Black poet) Césaire meets Sun Ra."

If you heard Sun Ra's Arkestra perform his experimental, sometimes cacophonous music live, you probably never will forget the experience. In comparison, saxophonist John Coltrane, one of jazz's most influential players who died in 1967, is nearly a crossover figure. For instance, many jazz enthusiasts love his appropriation of Rogers and Hammerstein's classic title track on the LP, "My Favorite Things," but the Coltrane to whom Alexander's cosmic ray-gun word-blasts are dedicated is more likely the free jazz inspired, star-climber of 1963's "Ascension."

What I am implying is there is nothing conventional about these poems. It's hard to go more than a line or two without encountering a challenge to the reader's (any reader's) vocabulary, and most stanzas will send you at least once on a Google search.

If you believe that poetry "should be accessible to all readers," a standard articulated by some poets, this is not the book for you. If you're up for a challenge, you'll find a worthy one in *Divine Blue Light*. Taking the book in short bites, a few pages at each session, may make for a better experience.

Let's start at the beginning, with one of the collection's major poems, "Condoned to Disappearance: for Fernando Pessoa." The Lisbon poet who wrote in the early decades of



Photo: Leni Sinclair

the 20th century, but published almost nothing in his own lifetime, created scores of heteronyms for his imaginary poets who wrote in different styles and voices.

His journal-like manuscript, titled "The Book of Disquiet," describes an existence tailored to his preference for solitude, "inertia and withdrawal." In "Condoned," however, Alexander finds the beauty and integrity in what appear to most as Pessoa's self-defeating choices:

"flowing from various forms rife  
with altering  
your personality  
human microbial filtration  
as anonymous fantasmic shift  
of various lingual maturation  
being high art as cinder  
as itinerant breathing codes that  
range from susurrant of inaudible  
deafening"

As Pessoa did away with personality in his own life, only to create a multitude of voices in his verse, Alexander does away with capitals and punctuation and familiar standards of syntax, spelling and vocabulary. You can see the attraction. Translating, in the lines above, a conventionally valued concept, "personality," into microscopic components suggested by the phrase "human microbial filtration," Alexander's verse turns "high art" to "cinder."

The poem is full of striking images. Pessoa's fictional identities are not competitors, the poet tells us, but voices "that glisten in themselves/ because you understood that the void continued to blaze..."

Alexander may be suggesting here an image for his own poem: a "void" that continues to blaze." Because its subject is clearly the eccentric and, to Alexander, courageous life choice of a known literary figure, readers may find this poem, as I did, among the more easily accessible in this volume. Pessoa invents new selves. Alexander invents new meanings, and in some cases, new words.

In a later poem, "Language: Replete with Transformative Monsters," we are faced at once with "Language/ as scaled erisma," a word that defeats me, and yet the poem, as it unwinds itself in chemical chains of metaphor, is irresistible:

"as amplification that burns  
& activates its own neter or principle  
That blazes via written skill or utterance  
& sonically blinds with its own display  
..."

Alexander frequently uses the word “as” to suggest a kind of comparison, similar to the more commonly found “like” in ordinary language, but these poems are all about unlikely comparisons. I read “as” in this volume to mean “as in the manner of.” A poem that addresses the nature of language does so almost entirely by showing its protean characteristics, its range of possibilities. As a writer, an obsessive user of language, this approach entrances me. One thing to be said in favor of Alexander’s poetry is that you will not mistake it for prose.

Working your way through a four or five-page poem in *Divine Blue Light* can prove more rewarding than a whole book by more conventional poets. In a long poem dedicated to Coltrane – the creative divinity invoked at various points in this volume – titled “Divine Blue Light: Sudden Ungraspable Nomadics,” the verse consists of strings of ineffable comparisons opened by the word “as.” In fact, the pursuit of the ineffable might be a way to describe the missional quality of these poems. Here we have the “divine blue light” of Coltrane’s music or, perhaps, inspiration, poetically characterized

“as quantum  
as perpetual  
as Inter-Dimensional Kindling  
...”

Later in the poem, in lines addressed directly to “Trane,” we read:

“it was your sonic grammar that climbed  
& now registers as sonic echo far beyond gregarious misnomer  
Not as a dazed mercurial haunting  
Or as plague  
Or as sound that roams as superstitious poltergeist  
But as anthem of itself  
As profoundly philosophical altering of itself.”

I’ve never read anybody write about music this way, as if the words themselves came, in fact, from inside the sound. At the poem’s end, the poet raises the idea of “symbols” suggested by the music’s “sonic grammar.” Not as “Quotidian measurement,” Alexander writes:

“but as suns that extend & measure themselves  
Never confined to the testament that is reason...  
But as the highest drama that specifies complexity  
...”

Anyone looking for that kind of linguistic drama will find it in Will Alexander’s most recent collection of poetry. If anarchism in literature involves breaking down conventions of thought and expression and exploring new ways for words and ideas to rub shoulders, set off sparks, and make beautiful music together, then Alexander may be its prophet.

Robert Knox is a fiction writer, poet, and *Boston Globe* correspondent. He is a contributing editor for the online poetry

## The Photography of Leni Sinclair

Using the descriptor, ironic, to define

almost anything has become an overused cliché. However, Leni Sinclair’s 1966 photo of John Coltrane taken at Detroit’s Drome Lounge deserves that adjective. The image has been displayed in museums and reproduced hundreds of times.

Leni Sinclair’s photos first appeared in the *Fifth Estate* that same year in the then-tabloid’s second edition. Although the paper’s content was filled with articles about opposition to the Vietnam War and support for civil rights, the cover story was entitled, “The New Sound of Sound,” written under her full name, Magdalene Sinclair, and was accompanied by her photographs of Detroit musicians who were turning the world of jazz upside down. See issue at [fifthestate.org/archive](http://fifthestate.org/archive)

The music, poetry, and other forms of cultural innovation and rebellion emanated from the Detroit Artists Workshop, co-founded by Leni, her partner, John Sinclair, and several others. She was born in Königsberg, Germany in 1940 and emigrated to the U.S. in 1959 where she studied photography in Detroit. Her photos award-winning photos have featured Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk and other jazz greats as well as rock bands such as the MC5, Iggy and the Stooges, and many more.

Leni, John, and Pun Plamondon, formed the anti-racist White Panther Party in Ann Arbor that called for a “total assault on the culture,” as part of a revolutionary, anti-capitalist 10-Point Program.

Leni has had numerous other photos in the *Fifth Estate* including covers and she continues her photography. She has written two books, *The Detroit Jazz Who’s Who and Detroit Rocks! A Pictorial History of Motor City Rock and Roll 1965-1975*. Recently, her photos were published as a 408-page, large format book, *Motor City Underground: Leni Sinclair Photographs 1963-1978*.



journal, *Verse-Virtual*, on which his poems appear regularly. They have also appeared in journals such as *Unlikely Stories*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *New Verse News*, and *The Eunoia Review*. His poetry chapbook, *Gardeners Do It With Their Hands Dirty*, was nominated for a Massachusetts Best Book award. His collection of linked short stories, *House Stories*, was published by Adelaide Books last year.



**Welcome Home**  
Clarrie and Blanche Pope  
Minor Compositions 2022

A tale of squatting told in a graphic novel

## Cruel memories of displacement

SEAN CLEARY

**W**hen I picked up Clarrie and Blanche Pope's *Welcome Home* and saw the tower block on its cover, it shook out of me a memory of watching the BBC documentary series *The Tower: A Tale of Two Cities* about the privatization of the Aragon Tower at the Pepys Estate (housing estate is the British euphemism for public housing, or projects for Americans unfamiliar).

It was 2007 and I was living with a cousin at the time who'd once lived in the tower and because of this the whole thing struck her as something verging on a lived memory.

In the opening sequence of the documentary, scenes of the run-down estate are interspersed with interviews of young professionals, and the parents who bankroll them, touring models of the luxury apartments that would soon replace the estate's massive riverside apartment block, Aragon Tower.

A brochure for the future, an interview with the middle-class urban aspirant, cut against a man kicking in a door for eviction, a juxtaposition common in that era's investigative documentaries, and one that the director Anthony Wonke uses to jarring effect to play a joke on the pleasures of the prospective middle-class urbanites and glossy brochures: there's no papering over the incongruity of their words, no hoarding plastered with pleasant renderings to block out the destruction.

Clarrie and Blanche Pope's *Welcome Home*, a beautifully composed graphic novel about a council estate on the verge of privatization, doesn't quite use the same heavy handed ironic juxtaposition. But in their graphic novel, depicting not the Pepys Estate's privatization, but that of a different tower block, in a fictionalized Newark of Zone 1 South London, the authors bring out the cruel ironies of memory and destruction central to any displacement.

In writing about council housing in London, it's a well-trod story of displacement and fear, abandonment, and greed at once, but the Popes do something more with the form. Like the 2007 documentary, the Popes utilize the empty language of the luxury flat brochure and the eager displacers to great contrasting effect. Their employment of this contrast is less jarring than in Wonke's directing, which allows the graphic novel to find a less cynical humor, a more inclusive

and hopeful one.

Interspersed throughout the book are pages pulled from the new brochures, pages deftly drawn that splash big images of middle-class Londoners with smiling noseless faces beaming the uncanny quality of modern urban progress. One page bears the slogan “Cycle Recycle Be Cycle” spilled across scenes of smiling people shopping at the manufactured bespoke retail synonymous with London’s urban middle class.

These images of the future are set in contrast to *Welcome Home*’s story, which follows a group of self-declared squatters. In the first sequence, the Popes give a run-down of how they break into and occupy an abandoned flat in the tower block in a comic, step-by-step process, a guide of sorts. They want to join and support community resistance to eviction, bringing with them their questions about belonging, activism, and how to square anti-capitalist activities with a life inexorably stuck within the capitalist framework.

Still, perhaps like all things, at the novel’s core is a love story. Our main character Rain, loves her friend Eva. Eva loves and doesn’t love her boyfriend, Tomaks, a restless and sometimes lovable man caught between the worlds of his own life in London and that of his parents in Poland.

It’s a love story that the Popes set alongside the central questions of the novel: how do we belong, and how do we band together to resist? How do we, despite everything, remain after the inevitable wrecking ball does its job on our communities?

Clarrie Pope, the visual artist of *Welcome Home*, brings to this plot a black and white set of drawings that blend sharp contrast with a cinematic sense of perspective as playful with its framing as the language is with the dialogue of its subjects. The book is full of small moments that can’t be quite explained, but ground the action in familiar life.

In one scene, Rain talks with a childhood friend who lives in the building, and as she talks she plays with a clothes pin (she’s in the middle of hanging laundry to dry across the living room of the flat). When, in frustration, she says something unkind about her roommate, Eva, that she’s fallen for, the panel zooms in on Rain’s hand.

She’s pinched it with the clothes pin, as if the pressure from its soft wood offers her something of penance. It’s a small moment, but these moments abound in this wonderful book. It gives *Welcome Home* a quality of a world you can open up and explore, finding each time something new, some new evidence of the past winding its way through the action.

This is what makes it worth reading, inhabiting, and feeling. It isn’t just its art, the way it plays with its form—how official document and emotional expression inflect its playful use of the comic frame—and it’s not even the wonderfully rendered story which layers activism, memory, history, and love, but instead, why you should find this book and read it



International squatters symbol combined with the anarchist circle A.

is because it does all this with humor, wit, and a good dose of hope. When the wrecking ball comes—as it inevitably does—there’s something left. There will always be something left.

Rain, the central presence in the novel, works as a caregiver in an old-age home (a nursing home for the Americans), and it’s from her this sense of hope permeates the form of the story. Her imaginings, and her vision help anchor the sometimes-chaotic action and time-shifts, making the continuity of the different forms coalesce. In a single sequence we might jump from a memory, to an imagined hope, to a brochure for the old-age home, to the repeated moment of Rain opening the door of the facility with her employee badge. It’s when all of these worlds come together for Rain that she begins to see that what she sees on the surface is just the beginning of what is there.

Like in the fictionalized tower in *Welcome Home*, eventually all of the residents of Aragon Tower in the Pepys Estate were evicted. I’m often transported back to that time. I used to the time living with my cousin to travel, but, maybe ironically, that year I had been squatting, with varied permission, in her immobile caravan (a trailer of Americans) in her nettle covered garden. We watched the documentary. We booed the developers, and she remembered the families and fellow artists who’d lived there until the end.

She’d left years before, but as we sat there miles and years away in a cottage between rented sheep fields and a Christmas tree farm that stretched out into the summer gloom of Devon, it felt close. Then, seeing the gleaming banality of the new tower and its people, I felt hopeless, but these years later, *Welcome Home* offers something more.

Sean Alan Cleary is a teacher and writer from Cambridge, Mass. His work appears in *Gulf Coast*, *Public Books*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, and at [seanalanccleary.com](http://seanalanccleary.com).



**Bloc by Bloc: Uprising**  
The Insurrection Game 3rd edition  
Out of Order Games

## NADIA DI FIORE

**B**loc by Bloc is a strategy game inspired by contemporary protest movements. Designed and self-published by Greg Loring-Albright and T.L. Simons from Out of Order Games, it uses the tabletop board game format to illustrate the impact of gentrification and the power of popular uprisings. As in the two previous editions, the goal is to liberate the city before the military arrives to reestablish order. In accordance with their anarchist ethics, low-cost upgrade kits are available for owners of the second edition, and the source files are free online.

Traditionally, board games are seen as apolitical. The expression “keep politics out of gaming” is frequently used by gamers. However, strategy games are often imperialistic in theme, featuring well-known military battles, colonization, or industrialization.

In a game like *Puerto Rico*, players take the role of colonial governors. Indigenous peoples are represented as resources or obstacles to their project of territorial expansion. There are a few games that feature riots, but they tend to assume that someone plays the role of the police. Who the protagonists and enemies are often make players uncomfortable. It’s acceptable for American soldiers to kill terrorists while citizens fighting the police are a problem to more traditional gamers. In *Bloc by Bloc*, all players participate in an uprising.

The game takes place on a grid representing an unnamed city that is overloaded with the usual injustices such as an immigrant detention center, a private

university and an overcrowded prison. Up to four players play allied groups (neighbors, prisoners, workers and students) represent by colorful wooden blocks, while the police are the white ones.

The first few moves of the game read like a beginner’s guide to protesting. The groups have their own strongholds, but these are hidden in unfrequented corners. Each round is a night and has two phases, nighttime and sunrise. The nighttime is when groups take various actions around the city while police vans move around the city and attack at sunrise. The first night or two converge on public spaces. The police arrive, protesters erect barricades and gather equipment. Strategic decisions must be made by the protesters. Will medical kits and bottles for Molotov cocktails be looted from stores for immediate use or collected for mutual aid centers?

If you are familiar with the day-to-day practices of radical organizing, you know what takes up a lot of time: meetings! Players must send one or more of their blocks to meetings. New victory condition cards are drawn according to the number of blocks present at the meeting.

Having more cards to choose from is likely to give players an easier way to win. When the cops attack, they automatically defeat the protesters, unless the player has a useful tool, like umbrellas. The use of umbrellas, both as offensive and defensive devices, has gained in popularity among protesters from Portland to Hong Kong. Other popular tools among protesters, such as soup cans used as projectiles, have been added to the game. These mechanisms underline the fact that the battle is never equal. The cops are trained and equipped to easily beat up protesters.

Each district has a difficulty value determining the difficulty of liberating it. For example, liberating a district during the sunrise phase takes double the number of blocks. When a district is finally liberated, the card is turned over. The protesters organize a big party,

and the board becomes more colorful as more autonomous zones appear.

Each group present gets a choice between A or B, like a choose-your-own-adventure. The anarchist author Margaret Killjoy created micro-fictions depicting the moments of tension and joy that occur on the street during an uprising. The "Comrade Cookout" card gives you the choice between bringing plates of hot food to a nearby occupation or turning your attention to staffing the grill.

Victory is achieved at sunrise if players have occupied enough of the designated districts. To win, players must work together to push the police back and defend liberated areas from further police incursions. However, a large white tank is counting down to the arrival of the military on the game board side.

The countdown starts with ten nights remaining but moves forward at the speed of the police morale passes from timid to deadly. Once military show up, players lose. You can't fight the army, but you can slow it down. If you win, your newly liberated districts are allowed to continue to exist.

There are two distinct game modes: cooperative and semi-cooperative. They offer radically different representations of how insurgencies work. In cooperative mode, resources and goals are shared while each group must accomplish its own objective. Agenda cards are used in the semi-cooperative variant for three and four players to consider how many historic uprisings have been sabotaged by ulterior motives.

The vanguard and the sectarian groups are there for themselves and can only win by themselves. They betray solidarity because their agendas aim to hijack the revolution for their own ends.

Despite the attention to detail, this game is not a manual for preparing an uprising. The environment is familiar to those who have participated in such events and can help players understand the jargon used in the street or in activist writings.

In an interview with Crimethinc for a previous edition,

**Anarchists need to be able to imagine another world. This game allows them to explore the dynamics that shape social uprisings**



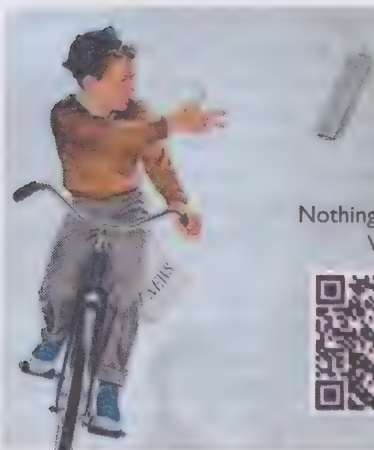
game co-designer Simons explicitly said, "The goal of this project is to produce a fun and educational gaming experience. . . .It's important that we don't take the project too seriously or overstate its political impact. That would be misleading and disrespectful to everyone who has been out there in the streets in real struggles that have real consequences."

This third edition will be the last, according to the designers. They managed to create a synthesis of the first two editions while adding new and deeper mechanics and strategies. Hence, the new subtitle, "Uprising" instead of "Insurrection" like the previous two.

Key actions are still based on modern uprisings: building barricades, confronting the police, occupying districts, looting shopping centers and creating mutual aid networks. Fun parts like spraying ACAB on walls and throwing Molotov cocktails at police cars are also present.

Anarchists need to be able to imagine another world. This game allows them to explore the dynamics that shape social uprisings with friends around a table. That said, it's a game for gamers more than for anarchists. Don't expect a Monopoly-like learn-on-the-fly level of play, as Bloc by Bloc offers a moderate level of complexity and is aimed at board game enthusiasts. If you are an anarchist who likes to play games, real ones in the street are much more rewarding although this one at the table won't disappoint you.

Nadia Di Fiore is a hyperactive lettering artist and illustrator from Montréal.



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## On Fascists & Microfascists

On Microfascism: Gender, War, and Death

Jack Z. Bratich

Common Notions, 2022

WILLIAM D. BUCKINGHAM

**9** 7-year-old Irmgard Furchner does not fit the stereotype of a murderous fascist. The diminutive German woman was slumped over in a wheelchair, cane in hand, when she was sentenced in court last December for her part in the murder of over 10,000 people during World War II.

Furchner's trial reminds us of the reach of fascist ideology under Nazism. She was a teenager when she started working as a secretary at the Stutthof concentration camp in Poland, dutifully counting incoming detainees as they were sent to their deaths.

She reminds us that Nazis weren't all young, blonde, athletic men with guns—they were women and girls, grandparents, and regular people from all walks of life. And, they still walk among us, including those, like Furchner, who were directly involved in the most horrific of Nazi atrocities.

Furchner's trial should also remind us that the fascist ideology that gave rise to the atrocities at Stutthof is, like the last survivors of Furchner's generation, still with us, as well. The fascist past gave rise to the neoliberal present, and we have inherited many of its ideological and political structures.

We bear witness to this fascist inheritance in the faces of terrified children stolen from their parents and locked up at the U.S.-Mexico border, in the latest revanchist attacks on women's health and reproductive freedom, and in the devastation wrought by the ongoing imperialist wars in Africa and the Middle East.

In *On Microfascism*, Jack Z. Bratich asks us to look beyond these statist manifestations of fascism in order to explore a microfascist cultural politics—the ways of being and understanding the world that precede the fascist state and



its violence. At the heart of Bratich's analysis is the concept of autogenetic sovereignty, a kind of "hyperindividualist" masculinity.

Autogenetic sovereignty means that the microfascist subject must disavow his (and they are always male, it seems) ties to his mother and social obligations in order to claim a king-like total

autonomy, without the encumbrances of family or community.

Bratich's protagonist is this would-be autogenetic sovereign, an anonymous white male, hiding behind a computer screen until the occasion presents itself for him to lash out in violence directed at women, minorities, or liberals in real life.

We follow this protagonist through chapters on gender, war, and death (or "necrotics," in Bratich's terminology). Bratich covers a lot of ground in these short chapters, addressing issues as disparate as the connections between misogyny and "sovereign subjectivity," the quasi-mythical war bands called *männerbünde*, dreamt up by fascist philosophers, and the anti-COVID lockdown protests of 2020.

An ancient, primordial gender politics forms the foundation of *On Microfascism*, in which woman comes to signify life and social bonds. Patriarchy emerges as the impulse to divorce oneself from these entanglements through initiation rites, warrior bands, and religion in order to achieve autogenetic sovereignty and claim power over life and death. Bratich explores how this premodern patriarchy gives rise to today's right-wing insurgency, in the form of practices like redpilling, internet trolling, and misogynistic violence.

The most glaring problem with all this is that this supposed primordial state of things isn't based in reality, but in the fantasies of 21st century fascist philosophers like Mircea Eliade and Julius Evola.

The anthropological and archaeological record actually tells a story of diverse gender relationships across different cultures and societies, of male and female imitation rites that often served to reinforce social obligations rather than sever them, of women warriors fighting alongside their husbands and brothers, and of religions based on the veneration of

# The new fascism is a vast and amorphous force, and we will need all the tools at our disposal to resist it.

motherhood and female sexuality.

On *Microfascism* touches on a vast array of scholarship and critical theory, but the sheer breadth of Bratich's source material means that many of these complex and challenging concepts receive what amounts to only superficial treatment. Sovereignty, for example, is a key concept for Bratich, but he takes it at face value, literally, to indicate a kind of king-like autonomy, ignoring the complexity and significance of the concept to anarchist thought.

As an example, for Situationist Raoul Vaneigem, the sovereignty of life is the overarching moral principle, in opposition to the notion of individual rights that imbues the capitalist state with its moral justification.

Noam Chomsky understood "popular sovereignty" as the essential feature of democratic governance—the freedom of people to govern themselves—under threat from growing globalist corporate power.

Anthropologist and anarchist activist David Graeber's understanding of state power rested on his rather starker view of sovereignty as the state's exclusive claim to the use of violence, whether in the form of the ritual violence of ancient kings or the execution chambers and police tasers of the 21st century.

The result is that Bratich's autogenetic sovereign winds up as a kind of shape-shifting straw man. He makes appearances as creepy pick-up artists, hapless "incels," "inspo-shooters," "packs of black holes," and internet trolls. In focusing on such a convenient microfascist villain, I fear we may lose sight of the bigger picture of the mainstream fascist resurgence that is already upon us.

Bratich explains that for Julius Evola, the "primary authority-making mechanism" of fascism lies not in nationalism, patriarchy, or racial supremacism, but in "the state and its autotelic sovereign." If this is taken to mean that the state exists for itself and its own ends, and holds the exclusive power to use violence, then we are already living under fascism by Evola's definition. The hapless "autogenetic sovereigns" we encounter in *On Microfascism* are not responsible for the new fascism. That responsibility falls on ruling elites and the state apparatus that serves their interests.

These concerns notwithstanding, *On Microfascism* will be a valuable resource for readers seeking a comprehensive account of current writing on microfascism. It also succeeds in bringing together a commendably wide range of perspectives on fascism, from Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault to Judith Butler, Patricia Hill Collins, and Silvia Federici.

The final chapter, on anti-microfascism, offers some original and compelling strategies of resistance. Bratich propos-

es, for example, creating spaces for ex-fascist confessionals, and appropriating some of the signature strategies of microfascism to use against it, such as humor, internet memes, and anti-fascism's own recourse to a mythical past.

I'm left wondering, where does the next generation of Irmgard Furchner fit into this? The masses of ordinary citizens who will find themselves in service to the new fascism on the rise today?

It's hard to imagine they will be motivated by revelations brought on by redpilling or mythical warrior bands. Rather, people will be motivated by a culture that values conformity and economic productivity above all else, by feelings like patriotism and fear, and by the desperation wrought by four decades of neoliberal economic policies.

The new fascism is a vast and amorphous force, and we will need all the tools at our disposal—including those developed in this book—to resist it.

William D. Buckingham is a writer and ethnomusicologist in New Orleans.

## Read to Kill

TAMAS PANITZ

Based on contraband, based on stealing fire, based on the thrill of nothingness I could consider paying taxes if reading is all you want and maybe a little tidying up. But as it is each night a new piece of shit falls from the hole in the sky. The vast arms that encircle us with their discontinuities remain unable to reach me aside from the occasional caress.

Fragments of fragments, one must recreate oneself in the image of conscious activity. When I leave this town, I'm stealing your bike-rack and putting my broken one through your windshield. It's like I told the cops, when I'm reading don't fucking talk to me.

Tamas Panitz is the author of several books of poetry, and other including *Conversazione* (interviews with Peter Lamborn Wilson) Autonomedia, 2022.

He edits the journal *NEW*. His paintings and stray poems can be found on instagram, @tamaspanitz.



The Magon Brothers, Anarchism, & the Mexican Revolution

## Magonismo Hits the Mainstream

**Bad Mexicans: Race, Empire, and Revolution in the Borderlands**

Kelly Lytle Hernández

WW Norton, New York, 2022

**BILL WEINBERG**

**I**t is definitely a hopeful sign that a briskly selling book from a mainstream publisher (one long-listed for the National Book Award) not only features anarchists, but actually treats them with seriousness and presents them as the good guys—even heroes.

The eponymous “Bad Mexicans” of Kelly Lytle Hernández’s sarcastic title are the Magonistas—followers of the notorious Magón brothers, early progenitors of the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution, who first raised a cry for the overthrow of the decades-long, ultra-oppressive dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. Bad Mexicans was the epithet used by both Mexican and US authorities for this network of subversives who organized on both sides of the border.

*Bad Mexicans* is also significant in its focus on the role of the borderlands in the changes that swept both Mexico and the United States in the first decades of the 20th century—centering a region that has been marginalized by traditional histories of both countries. In Hernández’s view, not only were the Magonistas critical in sparking the Mexican Revolution, but the crackdown on them by US authorities was instrumental in the formation of the FBI and much of the police-state apparatus still with us today.

This bi-national crackdown, undertaken at the behest of gringo captains of industry with economic interests on either side of the line (primarily railroads and minerals), involved President Díaz’s dreaded *Guardia Rurales* and the nascent US Bureau of Investigation (later the FBI) as well as the Texas and Arizona Rangers,

private police forces like the Pinkertons, and local sheriffs and bounty-hunters.

Hernández calls this a counterinsurgency effort, somewhat hyperbolically. The Magonista campaign was at this time one of agitation and organizing. The three brothers were, most famously, Ricardo Flores Magón, his collaborator Enrique Flores Magón, and the less enthusiastic Jesús Flores Magón, who started out as a supporter of the cause, but grew somewhat alienated as the other two siblings became radicalized. Democratic dissidents, but not yet anarchists, they launched their newspaper, *Regeneración*, in Mexico City in 1901, but by 1904 were openly calling for revolution against Díaz. The following year, they launched the Mexican Liberal Party (PLM) to advance this aim.

Repeated raids on their offices by Díaz’s authorities soon forced them into exile in the United States—first to San Antonio, later to St. Louis and Los Angeles. From there, they continued to publish, and had copies of *Regeneración* smuggled into Mexico, winning a following among both Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

Hernández details the abuses that fueled popular discontent on either side of the line. In Mexico, the ongoing harsh oppression of the Indigenous people, peasants, and the poor was punctuated by massive atrocities. An example was the forced relocation of the Yaqui indigenous people far from their homeland in northern Mexico to slave labor on the plantations of Yucatan after they had the temerity to rise up against encroachments on their lands in the 1890s. Also critical was the deadly repression of strikers at the US-owned Cananea copper mine in 1906.

On the US side, the period saw repeated instances of lynch-mob terror against Mexican Americans in the so-called Brown Belt of southern Texas, where a white supremacist system of Juan Crow was enforced.

Hernández also brings to light information on lesser-known figures in the same network of dissent such as the

anarcha-feminist Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza, publisher of the journal *Vesper*.

Acquiring guns and organizing armed cells (*focos*), the Magonistas launched sporadic raids across the border from US territory—most significantly, on Jiménez and, less successfully on Ciudad Juárez, both in 1906. This increased the pressure on US authorities to break up their network. Intense surveillance and police raids on the *Regeneración* offices in exile followed, forcing the Magonistas from city to city in the US. Ricardo for a while even took refuge in Canada. His followers in the southern border zone were meanwhile subject to what Hernández anachronistically calls “extraordinary rendition”—abduction across the frontier to be turned over to the *Rurales*.

But the transformation of the Magón brothers into anarchists was gradual and somewhat equivocal. As the name of the PLM implies, they were originally motivated by fealty to the ideals of Mexico's great Liberal leader Benito Juárez and his Constitution of 1857 that guaranteed basic freedoms, and which Díaz had betrayed. It was only in Los Angeles exile, late in his career, that Ricardo Flores Magón, influenced by figures such as Emma Goldman, declared himself an anarchist, calling not only for overthrow of the Díaz dictatorship, but abolition of the state altogether. In a rather blatant contradiction, even after this he would put himself forth as a candidate to challenge Díaz for the presidency of Mexico.

It's to Hernández's credit that she avoids hagiography. These contradictions are acknowledged, as is Ricardo Flores Magón's unfortunate sexism. Even after being befriended by Emma Goldman in St. Louis, his writings revealed that he viewed women in the revolutionary struggle as mere auxiliaries and cheerleaders for the male protagonists. When he got into a faction fight with Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza, he outed her (accurately or not) as a lesbian in the pages of *Regeneración*. This was not the only time he resorted to the homosexual stigma against political rivals.

The embrace of anarchism also inflamed factionalism in the Magonista organization, with the liberals and socialists ultimately defecting. Ironically, by the time the Mexican Revolution broke out, the Magonista star was setting. The last, disastrous hurrah was the northern Mexico campaign in Baja California of early 1911. It was debilitated by the factionalism and, ultimately, a complete paucity of military discipline. Most embarrassingly, gringo filibusters tried to piggy-back on the Magonista expedition, hoping to seize pieces of Mexican territory, allowing Díaz to stigmatize the campaign as a neo-colonial venture. Hernández gives this episode somewhat short shrift, detailing the attempted taking of Mexicali, but not Tijuana or Ensenada.

By this time, the more patrician, mild and reformist opposition figure, Francisco Madero, had more plausibly challenged Díaz for the presidency, and, denied it by fraud,

organized an insurrectionist campaign to successfully take Ciudad Juárez—the first real battle of the Revolution. Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, the two great peasant revolutionaries of Mexico's north and south, respectively, launched true insurgencies that won broad support and persisted for years. Yet Magonista influence could be seen in these new movements. Zapata had been a reader of *Regeneración*, and there was clearly a strong stamp of anarchism on the Zapatista insurgency.

Ricardo Flores Magón, in failing health, disappeared into the US prison system. Having been unsuccessfully prosecuted for violating the Neutrality Act in the attempted Magonista raid on Juárez, in 1918 he would be successfully convicted under the Espionage Act for encouraging draft resistance in the pages of *Regeneración* amid World War I and the attendant Red Scare. He died in Leavenworth federal penitentiary in 1922 at the age of 48.

He would, however, be posthumously lionized as a hero of the Mexican Revolution, and his remains have been reinterred at the Rotunda of Distinguished Persons in Mexico City.

While generally unflinching, Hernández does sometimes try to sanitize her material. She writes that the Mexican Revolution restored democratic rule, without mentioning that, once victorious, it shortly degenerated into an authoritarian one-party state with the agrarian and autonomist vision of Villa and Zapata largely betrayed—as the two peasant leaders themselves were, to their deaths.

She also mentions that the Magonistas were petitioned by some of their followers to adopt exclusion of Chinese immigrants from Mexico as a platform plank, but perhaps too readily exculpates Ricardo Flores Magón of sympathy with this position. She discusses the Chinese Exclusion Act and deadly attacks on Chinese immigrants in the US as indicative of the xenophobic climate at the time. However, she does not mention the deadly pogrom unleashed on the Chinese community of the Mexican city of Torreón when it was taken by revolutionary forces in 1911, with more than 300 killed. Some historians, most notably Carlos Castañón, author of a study of the Chinese of Torreón, have blamed local Magonistas for stirring up anti-Chinese sentiment.

Hernández calls herself a rebel historian. We need more of these, but also those with the fortitude to be ruthless even in treatment of their own heroes. All told, Hernández gets high marks here. Hopefully her work, almost certainly the most in-depth yet on *magonismo*, will spur further explorations of this formative period both for Mexico and Gringolandia, and the largely overlooked role of anarchism.

Bill Weinberg is the author of *Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexico* (Verso, 2000).

He blogs daily New York City on global autonomy struggles at [CounterVortex.org](http://CounterVortex.org).



*The Menu*, featuring, l-r, Hong Chau, Anya Taylor-Joy, Ralph Fiennes, and Nicholas Hoult. Dinner is served!

## If you have the stomach for it **Bon Appetit**

*The Menu*  
Dir: Mark Mylod (2022)

**CHRIS GARNET**

**J**udging from *The Menu*'s trailer and promotional images, it seemed as though it was going to literally be an *Eat the Rich* story. While a movie with a cannibal revenge plot would have been entertaining, there was some welcomed nuance and style within the film that made up for some of its disappointments.

The film is a satirical story about class divide which seems in vogue right now in Hollywood. Perhaps a response to the success of *Parasite*, the brutal 2019 Korean movie on the same theme? The basic setup is a small group of very wealthy and well-connected people go to an exclusive island to enjoy a tasting menu from a highly regarded and exclusive chef. The guests chosen to come to the island represent several different caricatures of wealth, such as tech bros and old money. These diners unknowingly are walking into a spectacle that involves more than just eating food few can afford. They won't be able to simply give a credit card at the end of this meal.

*The Menu* will stir up many feelings for food service workers past or present. From smiling at rude entitled guests, to working with a megalomaniac executive chef;

many of the stressors and anxieties of restaurant work are present here. Hong Chau, who plays the host Elsa, gives an excellent performance who is seething with resentment just below the surface. It's impossible for service workers to not have a visceral reaction when they hear, "Yes, chef!" shouted in unison to the kitchen's authoritarian Chef Julian Slowik (Ralph Fiennes).

The central focus of the film revolves around Margot (Anya Taylor Joy), and Chef Slowik. Slowik sees that Margot is a sex worker providing a service not unlike that delivered by the kitchen. Margot has ended up on the island because she was hired to be there by one of the other diners. Slowik realizes she is not part of the rich class and constantly presses her to decide where she will sit. "I need to know where to seat you, with us or with them. Do you want to die with those who give or those who take?"

Before each dish in the multi-course tasting menu, Slowik waxes poetic about the significance of each item served. This includes a bit of dialogue where he discusses the history of bread and how it was the food of the common, but because the diners "are not the common man," he serves them a breadless bread plate with only dipping sauces. A figurative middle finger to the diners that is both hostile and funny.

The culture surrounding these decadent dishes is also skewered within *The Menu*. The obnoxious foodie Tyler (Nicholas Hoult) is easy to laugh at and be disgusted by. Especially considering 23 percent of households in the United States have experienced food insecurity since the coronavirus pandemic hit according to researchers at Northwestern University. Restaurant prices are also increasing around the United States. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, wholesale food costs have gone up 17 percent from March 2021 to March 2022. It's simply more expensive for everyone to eat these days, so when Tyler is slurping up a \$1,250 meal, the viewer can't help but loathe him.

The strength of *The Menu* resides in its subtlety. Margot sees an old client with his wife in the dining room who remarks how much Margot looks like their daughter, which the husband denies. It's succinct and well executed without bludgeoning you over head with what's being shared.

Lillian, a snobbish food critic, played by Janet McTeer, comments during one of the courses that "we're eating the ocean" which is darkly true metaphorically and literally. Commercial trawler nets are literally destroying our oceans so people can eat seafood.

Without spoiling the movie, it feels as though *The Menu* is saying class war is futile. It begs the question, was there an earlier draft of the script where this wasn't the case? A movie where the rich get their just desserts and the workers live and succeed in some way may have been too dangerous for a subsidiary of Walt Disney to produce and stream on HBO.

What is portrayed honestly in this film is abusive power dynamics that exist in workplaces. Slowik is a tyrant who

humiliates and denigrates his staff. It comes out that in the past that exists before the movie, Slowik made a sexual advance towards one of his sous chefs, and was shut down twice. He then ignored her for eight months and wouldn't even make eye contact. Despite this, the staff still reveres, respects, and appears to love Chef Slowik. This ends up with the staff looking more like a cult than Eat the Rich revolutionaries who want revenge on the wealthy.

Sadly though, many workers have to ignore their instincts and not leave abusive working conditions. Money dictates that people often stay in unsafe and uncomfortable situations to feed and house themselves. This harassment is unfortunately all too familiar for many restaurant workers. A 2021 study by One Fair Wage found that 70 percent of women restaurant workers have been sexually harassed and 44 percent of those women were harassed by an owner or

boss.

*The Menu* can seem a bit nihilistic since it points to a problem without illuminating a way forward. Slowik's motivations can, in brief moments, feel political and revolutionary, but ultimately his actions are personal in nature. It is because of this that the message of the movie feels like its teeth were filed down.

Even though *The Menu* falls short in some ways, it is still an overall funny, well-acted, and enjoyable watch that has the ability to spark discussion and ideas. A world without restaurants staffed by wage workers and run by authoritarian chefs and bosses would be wonderful, and the food, made through love instead of through coercion, would certainly taste better.

Chris Garnett is an anarchist educator living in New York.

## The 19th century was wilder than we thought The Cultural Avant-Garde & the Paris Commune

OLCHAR E. LINDSAN

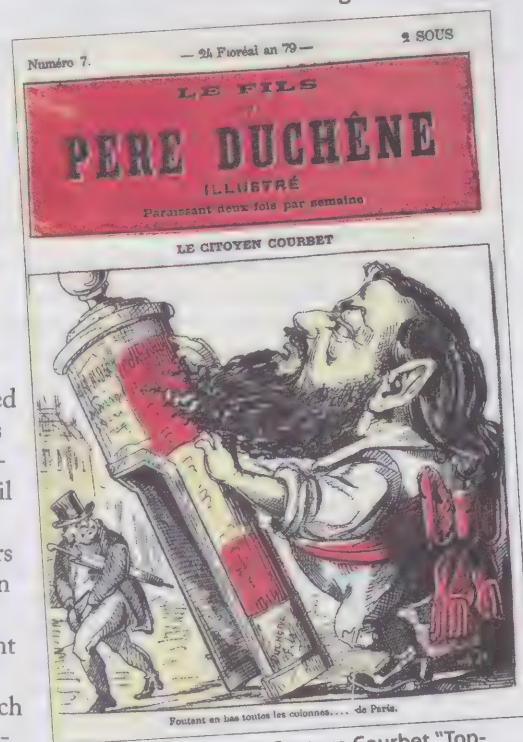
**I**n May 16, 1871, one of the most famous monuments in Europe, the Vendôme Column celebrating Napoleon's imperial regime, was toppled to the cheers of thousands. It was one of the largest public ceremonies of the short-lived Paris Commune where revolutionaries controlled the city, establishing a free and egalitarian society that lasted a little over two months until suppressed by force.

This was only one of many effects of avant-garde anarchist artists and writers on the Commune, and their participation would change experimental culture in their era.

On the eve of the Commune in 1870, Napoleon III's totalitarian government was showing cracks, and beyond the sham legislature, the opposition was organized in a diverse network of numerous semi-secret radical organizations. French culture was experiencing the same pressures and tensions as other facets of society. Censorship was tight and official art was stifled and pathetic.

Popular culture seethed with new forms defining and re-defining themselves. Since the early 19th Century, hybrid coffeehouse-entertainment venues called singing-café (café-chantants) gradually developed their own styles of emotional or comedic chansons and performance poetry. Satirical cartooning had been a major subversive force since the 1830s. Shadow theatre, which was popular for about a century, was rapidly developing visual languages and mechanical technologies that presaged animation.

The French "cruel tale," developed in the 1830s, was on the verge of giving birth to the horror genre, and science-fiction genre began to peel off from the utopian novels that spawned them. All would converge after the Commune in cabarets, where an anarchic collage of music, comedy, poetry, puppetry, Gothic melodrama, and dance whirled together with contradictory genres and moods.



Cover cartoon of artist Gustave Courbet "Toppling all the towers" from the radical magazine *Le Fils du Père*.

Though the older movement of avant-garde Romanticism still existed, countercultural poetry was becoming dominated by Parnassianism, a loose heterogeneous network of underground poets committed to formal sensuousness who preferred small, tightly knit affinity groups of readers rather than mass audiences, pursuing poetry as a mystical discipline. Stereotyped later

## Communards bring down a statue of Napoleon.

as an apolitical, ivory tower movement, Parnassianism was actually quite diverse and involved a considerable number of radical poets.

The Parnassian poet, musician, and feminist Nina de Villard (a.k.a. de Callias & de Villars) hosted a weekly salon bringing together people working in the intersections of avant-garde poetry and radical politics, including Paul Verlaine, Louise Michel, and the comedic poet and inventor Charles Cros (her long-term partner).

Counter-cultural painting was dominated by Realism, which shared the Parnassian rejection of market capitalism, but manifested it in an almost opposite way, in gritty portrayals of the everyday lives of workers, prisoners, farmers, and those living on society's margins. Numerous artists and writers shared this general tendency, which was strongly associated with leftist politics, whether or not officially affiliated with the self-declared Realist movement.

Its most notorious painter, Gustave Courbet, had connections with anarchist groups influenced by Proudhon and Bakunin. Realists, such as Honoré Daumier, Sapeck, and André Gill, had roots in political cartooning.

These tendencies met and merged with aspects of proletarian and bourgeois culture in the hybrid and ever-changing subculture known as Bohemia, which was at a low point in its vitality, having seen its heyday in the 1840s. Many radical journalists and future Commune leaders frequented the Bohemian scene, including Jules Vallès, Raoul Rigault, and Prosper Lissagaray.

In July 1870, the French Emperor declared war on Prussia. By January, the French military effort collapsed and Paris was under siege. Napoleon abdicated and was replaced by a provisional liberal capitalist government which promptly entered into capitulation negotiations with Prussia. In the ensuing elections, conservatives won most of the country, but Paris went overwhelmingly radical, leading to a series of confrontations and finally the flight of the national government from Paris.

On March 18, 1871, supported by National Guard units, Paris voted to secede from France and become an autonomous Commune, encouraging other cities to do likewise. Paris' neighborhoods (*arrondissements*) were run by grass-roots committees, while some industries and all government services were controlled by workers' committees or commissions from the Commune Council, that coordinated civic services and defense.

One of its representatives was the Realist painter Courbet, who also served on the anarchist-leaning Committee of Public Instruction, opposing the more authoritarian Com-



mittee of Public Safety in managing the Commune's policy on ideology and discourse. He was also elected president of the Federation of Artists to determine cultural issues, and initiated the plan to pull down the Vendôme Column as described above, one of the Commune's most lasting symbolic moments.

Meanwhile, anarchist avant-garde artists and writers collaborated in other capacities. The cartoonist Gill oversaw the Luxembourg Museum under the aegis of Courbet's Federation of Artists. The Parnassian bohemian poet Paul Verlaine ran the Press Bureau of the Central Committee. The bohemian Cros was a major in the defense force, and his partner Villard was likely a Communard as well, considering who attended her salons.

The bohemian poet-singer, Jules Jouy, was radicalized during the Commune itself, as was the Romanticist poet, anarchist, feminist, and educator Louise Michel, who became one of the Commune's most aggressive activists. She had to be dissuaded from an assassination attempt on French President Thiers, organized an ambulance station, and fought in a combat unit. After the Commune's fall, she was deported to the French South Pacific penal colony in New Caledonia. There, she remained committed to anarchism, and supported the indigenous Kanak people's revolt against colonization while imprisoned on the distant island.

Avant-gardists were involved in attempts to establish other allied Communes in cities across France. The Bohemian poet Paul Laforgue was sent to Bordeaux as the Paris Commune's envoy to the effort there. Alphonse Esquiros, an avant-garde writer and occultist from the older Romanticist movement, returned from exile in England to lead the lesser-known Commune established in Marseilles. One of his propagandists was the teenage anarchist poet, Arthur Rimbaud, Verlaine's future partner.

In reaction to the revolutionary ferment, the French national army was mobilized against the rebels, with aid from the occupying Prussian military. Though Paris functioned democratically for over two months, maintaining civic services all while under constant military siege, it could not hold out against the combined armies of France and Prussia.

## They used **humor, especially dirty humor**, as a means to open **discourse on gender and sexuality** including homosexuality.

The infamous Bloody Week of May 21-28 after its fall saw 20,000 mass executions of Communards, plus deportations and exiles.

The Commune's major cultural impact is easy to miss since all direct mention of it in plays, operas, and novels were banned for a decade afterward. Though Courbet fled to exile to escape prosecution for the Vendôme Column's destruction, Realism's direct social engagement won over Parnassianism's rarefied abstraction to become dominant in the underground.

The young Realist writer, Emile Zola, began as an anti-Communard, but came out of it an anti-authoritarian who later faced down the army and anti-Semitism in the Dreyfus Affair. He added a more rigorous framework of socioeconomic analysis, spawning Naturalism. Meanwhile, Parnassian anarchists moved toward Bohemia or the emerging Decadent movement, which denied the narrative of civilized progress and portrayed modern culture as on the verge of collapse. Their explorations of the irrational would inspire the first Surrealists.

**A** group of bohemian Parnassians including Cros, Verlaine, Gill, and Rimbaud, all individualist anarchists, came together in the wake of the Commune calling themselves the Zutistes (the name coming from the French exclamation of exasperation). Their poetry was a direct social practice, collaboratively composed and collected in an unpublished notebook.

They used humor, especially dirty humor, as a means to open discourse on gender and sexuality (including homosexuality), while reflecting the growing influence of pop culture, especially comedy, on the post-Commune avant-garde.

This embrace of low culture led to a new avant-cabaret movement and new flourishing of the bohemian scene in the 1880s. It was led by the Chat Noir (Black Cat) group, which included many anarchist and ex-Communard members, including Cros, Gill, Jules Jouy, and Sapeck. The nightly cabaret drew crowds from every social class and included experimental comedy, poetry, songs, dancing, shadow puppetry, and more, all packed with subversive humor. Their weekly magazine featured more of the same, plus satirical stories and cartoons, with a readership of 20,000.

Overlapping with the Black Cat were a constantly-morphing series of avant-comedic groups smuggling anarchic ideas under the radar in writing, art and music as well as real-life pranks and media hoaxes employing the names the Hydropaths, the Hirsutes, the Incoherents, and others. They established an anarcho-comedic tradition continued in later generations by Dada, Surrealism, Lenny Bruce, the Yippies,

Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, Andy Kaufman, and various others.

The dizzying hopes of the Commune's rise and the horror of its fall caused two paradoxical responses which have both shaped dissenting culture for the next 150 years: Decadence made defeat itself a weapon to puncture civilization's lie, while Bohemia turned comedy into a subversive force.

Both found the means of dissolving power in places where power cannot settle: the dream of its own rot, and the chaos of a burst of laughter.

Olchar E. Lindsann is a poet, theorist, publisher, translator, and historian of 19th Century radical and avant-garde counterculture. He is the editor of the DIY mOnocle-Lash Anti-Press, with a catalog of over 150 zines at [monoclelash.wordpress.com](http://monoclelash.wordpress.com).



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# A Hunt-the-Hunter EcoFeminist Murder Mystery Film

**Spoor (Pokot)**

Dir.: Agnieszka Holland 2017

## RIO MONTANA AND JACK MCMILLAN

**D**eemed by some to be an eco-terrorist story, Olga Tokarczuk's feminist novel, *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* is adapted by director Agnieszka Holland into *Spoor*, an exceptionally accurate rendering of a Polish language anarchist thriller.

A vengeful unknown is striking back at humans' ferocious power hierarchies. But the film noir's shifting perspectives from human to nonhuman animals gives the viewer reflective pause far beyond the plot's who-done-it denouement.



English hunt saboteurs interfering with a foxhunt as the rich follow a pick of hounds as they ride down the helpless animal.

From the first murder forward, the anarchist perspectives surges against law, church and culture in statements like, "You trust authorities too much. You have to take matters into your own hands," and actions that follow. Suspicions blur the plot as the anarchist theme builds the mystery throughout.

In the alluring remnant wildness of Poland's Kłodzka Valley, the government-religion-culture trifecta combine in ritualized seasons torturing and killing spree, hunting's most ghastly manifestation: massacre. The original Polish title, *Pokot*, refers to the group hunting ritualistic counting of slaughtered animals.

But this season, a spirit of resistance mounts a counter-attack revealed through a wildly compassionate nature-connected woman (Agnieszka Mandat) known only by her last name, Duszejko. She rejects being called by her first name, Janina, perhaps to de-individualize herself in solidarity with

the objectified hunted individuals with whom she so passionately identifies. She scoffs at society, having broken free from its prison via intuitive callings spawned in emotion not thought.

After Duszejko's dogs go missing, she channels her frustration and grief into railing against brutality enjoyed by hunters. She bravely butts heads with foundational patriarchal devices—law, church, and tradition. This trifecta erupts as its figureheads begin dropping dead under mysterious manners seemingly sending a message.

The hunters' deaths appear as being trampled by wild boars, choked on poached deer's bones, swarmed by forest beetles, burned by a magpie-lit fire, and taking a blow to the head by a deer. Could it be a human gone rogue taking a stand on behalf of the tormented?

Or, that the hunted themselves are somehow acting on their own behalf, the hunted becoming the hunter, "a sophisticated form of revenge for the way we... satisfy our cannibalism" (Duszejko). Or, perhaps another force is at work, a primal wild instinct to protect against suffering inflicted to the point no more could be endured.

Does this dark drama have a deeper message of total liberation from the blitzkrieg that is civilization? Most certainly for anyone who looks at it for what it is, poignantly revealed in the film.

The story's ending thankfully spares the audience today's mass delusion by not portraying what can never become, a wistful dreamy world utopia grounded far greater in false hope than reality. Since its inception, civilization has proven itself to be an irredeemable obligate killing machine at

war with wildlife. "*Spoor*" adeptly epitomizes this within a sliver of time.

Despite "*Spoor*"s stunning nature cinematography, the grim plot accompanied by a forlorn score, yields a tone of an incessant ecocidal ethos propelling civilization—a disconnection from and assault on nature that remains a timeless testimony of the past present and certain future.

There is no redemption, for civilization has always been fundamentally infused with a very anti-nature nature. The veritable sense readily gleaned from the film (and increasingly from our own existential angst) is that it can only be abandoned, left to its own devices to play themselves out toward inevitable demise.

Yet with a fury that lies beyond hope, Duszejko confronts the Leviathan with a fierceness that leaves the viewer heartened, if not for the despair that hovers as a pall over an Earth in anthropogenic hospice. Thrusting herself into

the midst of a hunting party. Bursting into the police station to report the murder of a wild boar. At Sunday service demanding that the priest come down from his pulpit, and pleading with the congregation, "Are you all fast asleep? Have you lost your minds?"

Most current films, if viewed with an honest heart and a free mind, are parodies of the dysfunctionalities and absurdities of civilization, hidden in plain view for all to see. "Spoor" cuts deeper taking the viewer closer to that screaming realization, yet it leaves it up to the viewer to proceed to its inevitable conclusion.

Duszejko prophecies that in the end, "reality will be reborn." May her spirit incite true liberation action until patriarchy decomposes and humans co-adapt into mutuality within an unfettered wild world.

Ria Montana is the author of *EcoPatriarchy: The Origins and Nature of Hunting*, and has essays in Warzone Distro [warzonedistro.noblogs.org](http://warzonedistro.noblogs.org). Jack McMillan is a co-founder of the Cleveland Vegan Society They admin the facebook group Vegan Anarchist Primitivist

## A novel chronicles resistance to the Vietnam War & the draft

### Passages of Rebellion

Fran Shor

Smart Set, 2021

### DANIEL HOLLAND

**P**assages of Rebellion, with its focus on 1960s activism, feels perfectly curated for 2023 readers.

Just as the country was polarized and divided in the 1960s, today's activists challenge convention and institutions, albeit with far more sophisticated technological capabilities, but with similar intent to their messaging.

Prioritizing human life, Fran Shor presents a unique angle through which themes of freedom and community are explored.

Draft resistance during the Vietnam war is an under-covered issue, so this fictionalized account of actual events offers up a fresh perspective. The story's central character Franklin Roosevelt Goodman's battle for justice leads him through a complex plot that never shies away from its acute criticism of the government. As Frank negotiates between the varying agendas for protest strategies of old left peace organizations and new left youthful militants, it is almost comical to realize that today's old left is composed of those youthful militants of the 'sixties who are now being confronted by a dynamic new youth movement.

The story begins in August 1970 as Frank prepares for an escape to Canada, fearing potential arrest for participation in the destruction of draft files at Selective Service draft offices in Minnesota. In a dream-state flashback to 1967, he relives the events that brought him to this precipice.

The ensuing chapters jump back and forth in time, perhaps a jarring construction at first, but it begins to make sense as the story unfolds. The writing is engaging, the pacing is brisk and taut, and the characters are authentic and nuanced.



While Frank struggles with demons both personal and political, we can empathize with his soul-searching as he careens from militant protester to merry prankster to nonviolent moral witness and forlorn lover. There is humor, adventure, mystery, and romance in this historical period piece based on real people and real incidents.

Shor delineates the antiwar and draft resistance objectives and tactics while also exploring the subjective perception of reality and the duality of human nature. There are captivating scenes that resonate today as inspirational for Frank's stand against unchecked political power despite personal consequences.

Together with his resistance comrades, Shor's protagonist devises plans to challenge the authoritarian power structures of the local university, the military induction center, the police, and the federal courts. The tactics they develop, focused on noncompliance, are particularly relevant to anarchists today as they seek to engage with the current politics of deceit and misinformation.

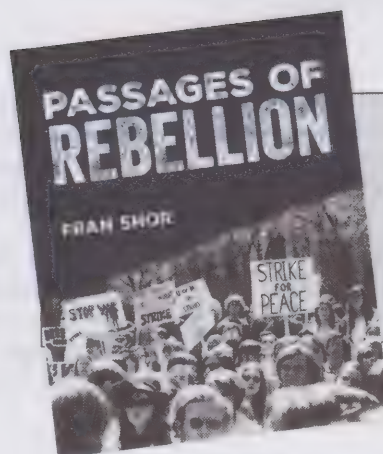
According to Department of Justice records, local draft boards accused 209,000 men of Selective Service violations, out of an estimated 360,000 draft resisters, resulting in 21,400 charges. These numbers overwhelmed the federal courts and undermined the ability of the Selective Service System to provide the bodies needed to prosecute the war, clear proof of the efficacy of resistance.

Shor also investigates some of the origins of current issues of women's rights, civil rights, gun control, political

divisions, and sexual and domestic violence. We are even treated to an eerie dream that portends a frightening monster of present-day reality. A gripping and gut-wrenching epilogue makes for a satisfying conclusion to this unique novel.

Full disclosure: I met Fran Shor at the University of Minnesota in 1967 where we were both students. He was strongly opposed to the war in Vietnam, a draft resister, and an inspirational public speaker.

Before the end of my freshman year, I was a draft resister and working full time in the same resistance organization with Fran.



Daniel Holland is the author of a memoir, *Death Wins All Wars: Resisting the Draft in the 1960s*. See Sharp Press (2019)

## Special Subscription Offer

Four issues of the Fifth Estate &  
Passages of Rebellion  
by Fran Shor  
See [www.FifthEstate.org](http://www.FifthEstate.org)

Fran Shor is Emeritus Professor of History at Wayne State University and the author of five nonfiction books, including *Weaponized Whiteness: The Constructions and Deconstructions of White Identity Politics* (Haymarket, 2020), and is a contributor to the Fifth Estate.



## Fifth Estate Archives: Preserving History We need reader help

**R**eaders of the Fifth Estate know how much we value the history of opposition to oppression. Accounts of resistance have always filled numerous pages in the 413 issues we've published since 1965.

The archive at [FifthEstate.org](http://FifthEstate.org) is a repository of articles that chronicle anti-authoritarian ideas and action from more than half a century that will not be lost from public memory.

The early staffs paid little attention to the notion that someday a history of the times would be of interest to future generations of rebels or historians. Revolution was in the air in the 1960s and '70s as was the Age of Aquarius.

The staff was then publishing a weekly Fifth Estate and either had no time or saw no need to retain what

would be a proper archive of issues, correspondence, and images. Some remain, but it is only the online archive that has proper coherence.

But, even what most publications take for granted, the retention of all issues printed, is incomplete. We are missing several issues from the 1960s and early 1970s to complete our series, and are asking for reader assistance. If you have any of the needed issues, we would be grateful if you would fill the gaps in our collection.

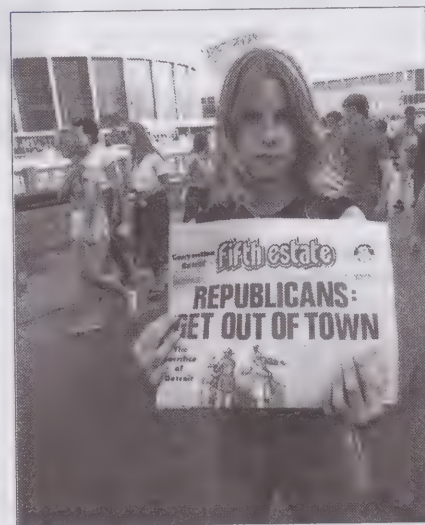
Here are the ones for which we are looking:

#104 Vol. 4, 1970	#109 Vol. 5, 1970
#126 Vol. 5, 1971	#129 Vol. 5, 1971
#130 Vol. 5, 1971	#147 Vol. 6, 1971
#180 Vol. 7, 1972	#181 Vol. 7, 1972
#182 Vol. 7, 1972	#185 Vol. 8, 1973

and, # 187 Vol. 8, 1973

If you have issues other than these particular ones, we can use those published prior to 1975. We are creating a second set. If we have duplicates, they can be traded for ones we are missing.

Mail issues you wish to donate for the maintenance of memory to Fifth Estate, POB 201016, Ferndale MI 48220. Mark the envelope with "Please Do Not Bend." Thank you.



From the Fifth Estate photo archives. A reader holding a Fifth Estate extra prepared for the 1980 Republican National Convention. The article archive is available at [fifthestate.org/archive/](http://fifthestate.org/archive/)



# Goes the Alphabet

## Time for a New One!

**Breaking the Alphabet**  
Sascha Engel  
Ardent Press 2022

**IAN BLUMBERG-ENGLE**

**C**ritiques of language and its objectifying, alienating effects are older than history itself (history defined as the linear, language-based story of civilization). Those early incarnations still exist today in mystical and spiritual practices like no-mind meditation, ecstatic dance, and mantra.

All of these techniques by-pass the language centers of the brain to experience relatively unmediated reality. Critiques of language also exist in nearly every spiritual and religious tradition.

All religions come from different forms of tribal mysticism and all mysticism is a critique of language and linear logic. In the 20th century, secular critiques of language and writing exploded from every direction including the structural approach of Alfred Korzinsky's *General Semantics* and the anthropological approach, documenting the mostly state origins of writing, by thinkers like John Zerzan and James C. Scott.

Despite the comprehensive and voluminous critiques, practical applications are relatively rare. There are two practical approaches worth mentioning. The first is David Borland's E-prime, English without the verb "to be." The second is anarchist Stephen Pearl Andrews' idea to use the phonetic Pitman shorthand used in office dictation as a universal writing system. Both of these ideas have some merit, but neither prove sufficiently radical or comprehensive to replace the alienation inherent in writing as a representation.

Thunder rumbles, lightning splits the sky, animals scurry for cover, and Sascha Engel's book arrives in the mail. *Breaking the Alphabet* is a square little book decorated with mysterious symbols and sketches that turns out are part of a new alphabet. Engel makes the case for, and then teaches his new alphabet in just over 100 pages.

Unlike E-prime or Pitman shorthand, the Anti-Alphabet, as Engel calls it, is aimed not just at improving writing, but at phasing it out altogether. For Engel, the most harmful aspect of writing is authoritarian iteration, repetition, reducing individual processes into a category of abstract things, removing them from their individual time and place.

The Latin alphabet is particularly guilty of breaking the world up into individual iterated letters with which to create individual iterated labels and then lay them out in a linear, logical structured sentence full of iterated rules. Every human interaction is hemmed in by the rules of language.

Engel finds the inspiration for his elemental antidote to iteration in the stone tool, which is removed only temporarily from its natural state, minimally interfered with, and then dropped back on the ground to continue its natural evolution. The Anti-Alphabet was created with this minimal intervention and a return to nature in mind.

The Anti-Alphabet takes elements from four writing systems: ancient Phoenician, Mycenaean Linear B, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, and the Latin alphabet. Each is chosen for specific characteristics that combat the structural biases of our alphabet to create a writing system that hopefully turns us away from the page and back toward the direct experience of life.

Phonetician and Linear B both break down the structure of words and sentences as well as adding competing phonemes and syllabograms. Phoenician is written right to left, without breaks for individual words, and contains no vowels.

Linear B breaks down the structure of words further by representing syllables instead of letters.

The final addition, the hieroglyph which, as Phoenician and Linear B destabilize the word and the sentence, destabilizes the symbol itself, never letting the reader forget the real world to which the symbol only refers.

Four writing systems have a combined advantage. There are multiple, sometimes many multiple, ways to write a single word or phrase so that the phrase can be repeated without ever repeating the set of symbols and thus side-stepping authoritarian iteration. Altogether, the Anti-Alphabet retains its readability just enough to get the job done while



The Anti-Alphabet takes elements from four writing systems: ancient Phoenician, Mycenaean Linear B, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, & the Latin alphabet.

breaking all the authoritarian rules of civilized writing.

This is a beautifully written, but dense book with all the precision and specificity of a technical manual and the flow and emotional weight of exquisitely crafted poetry. In the post-fact era of virtue signaling, disingenuous language police and double speak political rhetoric, a radical critique of language is an important focus of the anarchist project and Sascha Engel's contribution is a doozy.

Twenty-eight pages of the latter half of the book is devoted to the translation of 218 letters and syllables from the Latin alphabet to the Anti-Alphabet, making translating simple phrases and words relatively easy and fun.

Many people may find the task of learning a new alphabet a daunting one. But even without becoming fluent,

casual experimentation with the Anti-Alphabet may induce some interesting results and states of consciousness if even just by way of a comparative perspective.

Translate your favorite haiku or song lyrics into Anti-Alphabet, corporate catchphrases and sitcom theme songs, paint situationist slogans in the bathroom of your local McDonald's, a coded message pointing the way to Croatan.

Ian Blumberg-Engel is a model agnostic anarchist, writer, and utopian kook from Eugene, Ore. His work is focused on the intersection of mysticism and anarchism. He is co-author, with Peter J. Carrol, of *Interview with a Wizard* published by Mandrake of Oxford, and contributes interviews and articles to *Oak Journal*.



## IAN BLUMBERG-ENGEL

**T**he simple and obvious freedoms that first inspire the imagination of young kids, freedom of movement and freedom from the constraints of physical laws, are so simple as to hide a much deeper liberatory kernel.

From the blood sacrifice initiatory trials of learning to skate to the insular lingo, skateboarding is every bit the revolutionary community, in many ways like the revolutionary secret societies of Haiti. In contemplating a subject as broad as and as theoretical as global anarchism, it seems to be much more productive to explore areas of inspiration rather than explain proper applications. To this end, I'd like to explore the radical potential of one of my lifelong passions. Skateboarding.

The most basic element of skateboarding is the session, or sesh, a group of friends skating a spot. Part potlatch, part temporary autonomous zone, the sesh embodies both free play and universal struggle in a single act. Often a great sesh is made up of total strangers sharing drugs, food, and laughs. A skater only needs to enjoy a few sessions in a strange land before the locals happily welcome them into the fold and teach them all the unwritten rules of their new environment. This integrative aspect constitutes a sort of latent mutual aid network between all

skaters across the globe.

Like Haiti Voodoo societies, one of the central expressions of faith in the skateboarding community is the pilgrimage or the skate trip. A cross between a Hunter Thompson road trip and an Indiana Jones adventure into lost capitalist mythology, the skate trip is the high point of any skater's life, the truest expression of the urge.

In James C. Scott's history of the state, *Against the Grain*, he makes a clear argument that, while sedentism might not have spawned the state directly, it was definitely an important step in that direction. The nomadic nature of most hardcore skaters is antithetical to every aim of the state. It's hard for the state to tax, corral, quantify, coerce, and or control a moving population.

Since the very beginning of skate culture, with the barging (skater for trespassing) of southern California pools and continuing into the street skating of the '90s, skateboarding has always had a deeply ingrained illegalist tendency.

In the case of street skating, in a symbolic twist the Situationists would have loved, the most imposing architecture of the state becomes a playground for daredevil children. A thirteen-year-old Tyshawn Jones conquers the New York City courthouse banks (a concrete embankment with a huge drop at the bottom) and solidifies his legendary status in 2014's well named "Illegal Civ 2" video, from LA's Illegal Civilization

skate crew. As Consolidated Skateboards, a skateboard company that built its brand on its opposition to Nike and other corporate skate shoes, likes to proudly proclaim, "Skateboarding is a crime!" This tendency in skate culture orients most skater's world views and values toward fun, cooperation, creativity, mutual aid, and freedom, and away from rules, taboos, structure, boredom and control.

Taking it a step further, the trend of DIY skateparks has a long history in skateboarding but is currently having a moment.

Complicated, beautiful and dangerous homemade skate-

**A skateboard with an anarchist theme**



parks now span every continent of the globe, hidden under freeway overpasses, in old warehouses, storm drains, burned out homes and dead-end roads, concrete poured lovingly under cover of darkness by a construction crew with no bosses, no plans, no budget and often no acquaintance with their coworkers. One of my favorites, Lower Bob's, in Oakland, Calif. is replete with ornate tile mosaics and a build-in BBQ pit.

But it's not just skate cultures' feral charms and their negation of domestication we should take inspiration from, but also skateboarding's organizing principle: passion.

I'm not suggesting here that everyone should take up this activity, but that each person's own passions should rule and guide their lives the way skateboarding guides skaters, their own unifying mythologies.

The everyday rebellions of skateboarding creates a lively, free, minimally corrupted community in stark contrast to demeaning drudgery of everyday capitalism, pointing toward the feeling of an unadulterated life and attracting, not coercing, the decentralized voluntary network needed to not only sustain, but foster a new, free, and harmonious society.



## Mirror, mirror, on a different site The Fifth Estate Archive

Since 2013, the Fifth Estate Archive ([fifthestate.org/archive](http://fifthestate.org/archive)) has been an online source for this magazine's radical reporting, essays, and other texts published in our print edition for more than fifty-seven years. The archives contain 5,221 articles online to date, with more being added constantly.

We have worked hard to make the site user friendly and accessible to all visitors, including those who face challenges accessing print and the Web.

Several years ago, we contacted comrades at the Anarchist Libraries, an international platform for anarchist sites that focuses on publishing and archiving texts in many languages. They generously agreed to provide a second version of the Fifth Estate archive on their servers. You will find its main page at [fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net/special/index](http://fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net/special/index).

Besides acting as a security backup for our material (no trivial thing in these hackable times), the site offers some additional features. For example, it is possible to view the most recently added articles and to download articles in additional formats, such as .epub for viewing on mobile devices.

Thank you, thank you, comrades at Anarchist Libraries!

## Call for Submissions for the Next Fifth Estate Anarchist Review of Books

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**ALL POWER TO THE IMAGINATION!**



Capital & the State Created the Climate Crisis

## Grassroots organizing is the Solution



Indonesian anarchists are involved in opposition to palm oil biofuel plantations that have led to land grabbing and deforestation. Indigenous communities are the leading force, as well as environmentalists, in the protests. The land above was a natural forest before cultivated with palm trees.

**The Solutions are Already Here: Strategies for Ecological Revolution from Below**  
Peter Gelderloos  
Pluto Press 2022

LEX RITCHIE

**T**he climate crisis is here. While climate change coverage in mainstream media remains paltry, it is impossible to miss the ways the climate crisis is unfolding. Year after year of record wildfire seasons, of the warmest years on record, of devastating heat waves in Europe and Asia. And, this is only the beginning.

In the midst of this, there are breathless reports of promising new technologies in development or reassuring coverage of technocratic solutions being implemented. Each time they repeat the technocratic assessment of the situation: Climate change is a complicated problem and complicated problems require complicated solutions. Or, that much more scientific research still needs to be done.

This standard narrative is intentionally disempowering. It means solutions will be implemented top-down, preserving the power of those who created the crisis. It seeks to reassure the listener that this threatening crisis is being handled by experts and the state, ignoring the fact that it is the experts and the state which created the crisis. It is a totalizing narrative that enforces solutions ignorant of local peculiarities and conditions. It is one that enshrines a worldview of extraction and entitlement.

In *The Solutions Are Already Here*, Peter Gelderloos takes aim at the dominant narrative of the systems of capitalism and colonialism at the root of the crisis.

The book turns a critical eye on mainstream environmentalism and presents ideas for creating an authentic ecological revolution from the bottom up.

The book is organized in five parts guiding the reader from the present and rather bleak situation through to a place where a just and livable future can be imagined.

Gelderloos offers an anarchist analysis on which the rest of the book is based: that the current climate crisis is rooted in the extractive worldview and institutions of colonialism. The ecological crisis is one that is inclusive of every other crisis we face.

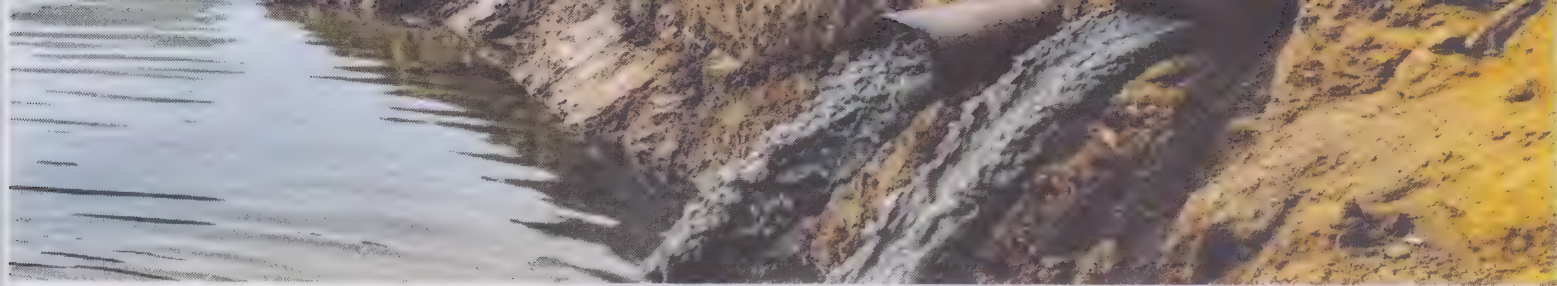
He demonstrates an anti-colonial praxis through interviews, allowing organizers and Indigenous people to speak for themselves and about their efforts to care for the earth and defend their way of life.

He presents some examples of successful opposition to the colonialist extraction from locally-based and led struggles in Indonesia, Europe, Brazil, and Venezuela, as well as positive outcomes in France, Catalunya, and the American Midwest. Pipelines are stopped, airports are canceled, biofuel plantations opposed, land reforested, and food sovereignty organized are among the battles fought across the globe chronicled in the book.

These accounts offer tantalizing descriptions of clandestine acts of climate rebellion from everyday people, such as an old car (*sans* engine) pushed into a Mediterranean bay to keep commercial bottom-dragger factory ships from overfishing. These mentions are necessarily brief and intentionally lacking in distinguishing details, given the illegality of such actions. But they are also deeply inspiring and this reader wishes there had been more of such stories.

Gelderloos then discusses the characteristics that his examples of successful movements share, and explains why they are strategically advantageous.

He contrasts some common pragmatic strategies for reform favored by progressive left environmentalist groups



such as Extinction Rebellion and the Green New Deal. While recognizing the crisis, such groups employ state-focused environmental solutions that wind up limiting the possibilities for the radical changes which are needed.

A possible weakness of the book is one that many identify in anarchist politics generally: an inability to go beyond specific examples to describe *how* one might achieve the objective of ecological revolution from below. However, Gelderloos makes up for such an inadequacy by providing inspiration and a viable framework so readers can figure out the how themselves.

Missing from the book is an exploration of the necessity of using some of the modern technology currently being deployed and researched to combat the climate crisis. All of these technologies require some form of compromise in working with the technocratic force the book positions itself against.

This is something Gelderloos acknowledges, but does not examine in detail. It also would have been informative if more examples of community-led, climate-friendly technology had been provided.

The final section of the book is an exploration of ecological imagination. Gelderloos offers an inspiring vision of what an ecological revolution from below might make possible for a near-future Catalunya and Spain where he lived for a decade. Ending with a vision for justice in an ecological revolution, he invites readers to reflect upon how they can plant their own seeds for ecological revolution.

This is the most exciting part for readers. Unlike so much of what is written about the climate crisis, *The Solutions Are Already Here* offers a vision and a framework that empowers each individual to respond to the root of the crisis. Gelderloos ends with an invitation to dream our own futures as a starting point for action. It is a welcome change of pace to explore one's own desires for climate justice, instead of being told to simply trust the experts.

All author royalties will go to Indigenous and anarchist initiatives in Brazil and Indonesia explored in the book, making this publication a part of the movement for which it strives to provide a framework.

*The Solutions Are Already Here* offers a convincing and inspiring vision for successful organizing and leaves readers with advice for how to make their own ecological revolution from below. This is a vital text for those who desire a revolution that honors the earth and ensures a life in balance with it.

Lex Ritchie is a queer and trans anarchist writer and mystic living in the Great Black Swamp (present day Northwest Ohio). Their work is rooted in helping to facilitate the flourishing of joy, magic, and solidarity in the world. [thelexritchie.com](http://thelexritchie.com)

## American River

NICK DEPASCAL

Walking along the river's edge,  
The water level low this year  
The receded river reveals

A lifetime's worth of accumulated  
Garbage. A bicycle straddles  
A burned out, gutted blue

Sofa, spilling its soggy innards  
To a sun close and ragged.  
I step through tall grasses

And reeds and feel the ground  
Give as my right foot crushes  
The jellied chest of a rabbit,

Left eye still open, intact, surveying  
The world's turning over and into  
The future, ceaseless, to the caress

And applause of a mourning mass  
Of flies gorging on the stink. I gaze  
Over the water, color of childhood's

Chocolate milk we chugged to build  
Our bones strong enough to labor cheaply,  
Consume greatly, or die in war. The water

Barely moves it seems, swirls lazily on  
Occasion, bubbles and froths in small  
Whirlpools, passes under bridges

Where homes are made, carrying hypodermics,  
Shredded clothing, condoms, flowers,  
Down the river far away, the city's dirty

Valentine delivered daily on the open  
Veins of the river, low this year, yet somehow  
still praiseworthy in its tattered beauty.

A cool flag, dissecting the city's body  
and teeming still with life in the midst  
Of the ongoing 21st century death parade.

Nick DePascal is a poet and high school teacher in Albuquerque.



## Resistance to the violence of World War II Anarchism & pacifism shaped later struggles

**War by Other Means: The Pacifists of the Greatest Generation  
Who Revolutionized Resistance**

Daniel Akst

Melville House, 2022

**ERIC LAURSEN**

**V**iolence is not all the same. Context matters.

There's something much worse about violence when it's perpetrated by or with the tacit acceptance of the State. It's not just that governments and their allies in the capitalist class and the patriarchy have more resources, more weapons, and fewer ethical qualms about killing than most. Beyond these obvious assets, they can hide behind the veil of legitimacy that the State (allegedly) offers them. Hitler, George W. Bush, and Derek Chauvin may not have a lot in common personally, but all committed their crimes under the reasonable presumption that the social and political order sanctioned such behavior.

This is where anarchism and pacifism—opposition to war—come together, at least some of the time. The case for pacifism, the British anarchist Alex Comfort wrote, “rests solely upon the historic theory of anarchism.” The fact that pacifism “takes its stand upon a pledge of disobedience” is what makes it a relevant form of political action.

To be a pacifist, in other words, you must be at least a little bit of an anarchist, because when it comes to inflicting violence, you don't accept that the State has the final word.

That was the position that a remarkable collection of American pacifists took during what was arguably the most popular and justified war of all time: World War II, the war against fascism. Rather than join the 16 million who served, some 37,000 conscientious objectors (CO) refused to register for the draft, refused to fight, and in many cases, went to prison for their disobedience.

The subtitle of Daniel Akst's new book makes clear that he intends to argue that the COs and their supporters deserve to be regarded as a “greatest generation” as much as those who enlisted, and *War by Other Means* offers the most well-rounded exploration of the wartime pacifists' story I have yet read. Beyond that, it analyzes in depth the personalities and philosophies of some of the most prominent COs, helping us to understand their ethical decisions and the way they went about making their opposition to war felt.

In so doing, Akst, a longtime journalist, sheds light on the intersection between pacifism and anarchism and the critical role the COs played in developing the new politics of protest and direct action that later informed the Civil Rights movement, the campaign to end the Vietnam War, the gay rights struggle, the fight to eliminate antinuclear weapons, environmental and AIDS activism, the struggle against corporate globalization, and the Occupy movement. War resistance was not new when Bayard Rustin, David Dellinger, and thousands of others decided to disobey (blues legend Willie Dixon was also one of them, refusing to fight for a country that institutionalized racism), and it's still going on, but their generation of resisters was possibly the most politically transformative of modern times.

It's an often-made argument that pacifism and nonviolence serve the State. But it all depends on how civil one's disobedience is. Certainly, refusal to fight does not undermine the State by itself, especially if one agrees to alternative, nonviolent forms of service and goes along with the routine. But thousands of wartime COs used their situation to agitate, organize, and expose the injustices of the State.

While many COs served in noncombatant roles as medics, others were interned in Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps where they were put to work outdoors without pay. Many of these camps they turned into “schools for radicalism,” Akst notes. At one camp in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, they protested their lack of pay by launching a campaign of vandalism and sabotage that included clogging toilets, hiding lightbulbs and silverware, and scrawling ob-

scenities. On leave in a local town, one group of “conchies” (from Conscientious) disabled their vehicle, got drunk at local bars, and got into a fight with a soldier.

When they refused to follow the CPS routine—something that made older pacifists uneasy—COs were often sent to federal prisons, where their treatment was much harsher. Wherever they landed, they found ways to turn their disobedience into a critique of an assortment of American injustices. They opposed racial segregation in prisons, often through work stoppages, slowdowns, and strikes, and documented abuses in mental hospitals where some were assigned to work.

Once back on the outside, they worked with supporters including the Catholic Worker’s Dorothy Day, the Fellowship of Reconciliation’s (FOR) A.J. Muste, and anarchist journalist Dwight Macdonald against the Allied bombing of civilian targets in occupied Europe, restrictions on the admission of Jewish refugees, and the internment of Japanese Americans, and helped focus the America left on the struggle for desegregation. (The Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) was founded during the war as an offshoot of the FOR.) Repeatedly in Akst’s book and the contemporary writings of people like Muste and Dellinger, pacifists made the inconvenient point that in the name of winning an all-out war against Hitler, the U.S. was adopting many aspects of Hitlerism itself.

Was this fair? Probably not, but it prompted at least some people to question whether America’s war really was for freedom and not for America’s own imperial, authoritarian project.

Akst argues, convincingly, that the wartime pacifists were charting a third course “between what appeared to be the corpses of capitalism and communism.” He traces their political roots to Thoreau, William Lloyd Garrison, and the other Abolitionists, whose activism often implicitly rejected the authority of the State. Many of the wartime pacifists, including Dellinger, Muste, and Day (although she had switched to the Catholic Church) had been raised in the same liberal Calvinist tradition, while Rustin was a Quaker. What most of them had in common, more or less, was a loose philosophy that Day called personalism.

The overlap with anarchism is clear. So is the attraction that personalism exerted for Martin Luther King, Jr., and other activists following the war who placed the human above ideology. As such, the wartime pacifists revitalized American radicalism by standing aside from the sectarian squabbling that had crippled the Old Left in the pre-war decades, just as many of them had focused on human rights and their abuse in the CPS camps and federal prisons.

Akst suggests that their refusal to adopt a controlling ideology became a deficit during the struggle against the Vietnam War, preventing it from becoming more organized and effective. But the situation was very different during



World War II pacifist draft resisters interned at a Civilian Public Service camp near Glendora, Calif. Their resistance continued in the camp.

World War II. The pacifists were a tiny voice that 99 out of 100 American at the time barely heard, while the Vietnam antiwar movement was a mass social and cultural phenomenon. As it happens, Muste and Dellinger (“a great person to get arrested with,” his friends said) were among the most effective antiwar figures when it came to holding quarrelsome coalitions together. It’s a fairer criticism that the new radicals of the 1960s never found a way to engage the American labor movement in their struggle, or generate an alternative for working-class people to the increasingly complacent and ineffective mainstream union establishment.

Nor did the wartime pacifists, during or after the war, ever achieve a decisive victory in any of the struggles they waged. Leftist sectarianism has not disappeared, and war, steered by State imperialism, continues to be a way of life for the U.S. So do racism and homophobia. But the new politics that the wartime pacifists pioneered, with its three elements of direct action, civil disobedience, and media-savvy public protest, has become a necessary part of the political landscape as the so-called democratic process increasingly blocks any other avenue to real change.

An example is a campaign that recently issued this call to action: “We refuse to let our forest be bulldozed in favor of the police and sold out to Hollywood. There are many forms of action and advocacy to be taken. This is a broad, decentralized, autonomous movement. Get involved in whatever ways move you.”

Dellinger, Rustin, and their comrades would have heeded the call to Defend the Atlanta Forest in an instant. They were in it for the long haul. *War by Other Means* is a superb account of their lives and achievement.

Eric Laursen writes frequently for the Fifth Estate. His new book, *Polymath: The Life and Professions of Dr. Alex Comfort, author of ‘The Joy of Sex,’* will be published this fall by AK Press.



## Alfredo Cospito Struggle Against High Security Confinement

**A**lfredo Cospito is a 55-year-old incarcerated Italian anarchist who has been on hunger strike since October 2022, protesting the brutality of his imprisonment. As we publish in March 2023, his condition is uncertain. His comrades fear he is near death.

In 2012, Cospito and a comrade kneecapped Roberto Adinolfi, the CEO of Italy's main nuclear power company, shooting him in the leg three times. Cospito was apprehended and sentenced to 10 years in prison. While imprisoned, he was convicted for planting bombs at a school for Carabinieri, the Italian elite police force. Although no one was injured in the explosions, he was given a life sentence without parole. The government decided that Cospito should be permanently removed from society as a dangerous anarchist terrorist.

In May 2022, after six years in the general prison population, Cospito was transferred to high-security, solitary confinement, Italy's 41-bis regime. This involves being subjected to cruel, psychologically and physically destructive conditions. The regime mandates that prisoners are kept in small cells only a few feet square, deprived of even glimpses of the physical environment outside the prison, and prohibited from having books, magazines, radio, television or other forms of news about the outside world.

They only get exercise one hour per day in a small concrete-walled yard with no greenery.

41-bis inmates are forbidden all outside personal contact except for a closely-monitored one-hour monthly meeting with family members, through a partition with no physical contact possible.

Cospito felt it imperative to express his opposition to this regime in the only way open to him, a hunger strike, which he began on October 20, 2022.

He repeatedly made it clear that he was adopting this measure to demand the abolition of the 41-bis regime, not just for himself, but for everybody confined in these terrible conditions. A long hunger strike is very grueling and dangerous. As time goes on, Cospito's health continues to deteriorate. As of this writing he is very weak and cannot walk. Nevertheless, he continues to refuse all nourishment.

Cospito is an insurrectionist anarchist and a founding member of the Italian Informal Anarchist Federation. This organization is distinct from the Italian Anarchist Federation. The former advocates armed struggle against the state, capitalism, and Marxism.

The Italian Anarchist Federation and many non-affiliated Italian anarchists, on the other hand, oppose violence as a tactic.

Despite political and tactical disagreements with Cospito, many anarchists and others have expressed solidarity with him and the goals of his hunger strike. Increasing numbers of people have been engaging in a variety

of protests and solidarity proclamations, inside and outside prisons, in Europe, and North and South America. Cars have been burned, banners hung, graffiti written on the walls of Italian embassies. People have been arrested, in some cases charged with terrorism. Prisoners in Italy and other countries have also gone on solidarity hunger strikes.

The neo-fascist Italian government, however, has not been responsive to criticism of 41-bis. They do not want to appear weak against a single anarchist who is willing to die in order to abolish an unjust law.

The 41-bis regime was supposedly introduced to isolate mafia kingpins with whom very few ordinary people have sympathy. But, little by little, first under the social-democrats and now under the neo-fascist government, the law is being applied to other categories of prisoners, mainly political.

Cospito's lawyers have appealed the conditions of his confinement to the European Court of Human Rights. They published a letter from the imprisoned anarchist in which he states:

"I am convinced that my death will be an obstacle to this regime and that the 750 who have been suffering from it for decades will be able to live a life worth living, whatever they have done. I love life; I am a happy man. I wouldn't trade my life for anyone else's life. And it is because I love it that I cannot accept this hopeless non-life."

RYAN FLETCHER

# Remembering Jen Angel

1975-2023

## The senseless death of a friend & comrade

**B**eloved long-time social justice activist, anarchist, and owner of the Oakland, Calif. Angel Cakes bakery, Jen Angel, died on Feb. 9. Jen passed on after three days on life support following critical injuries suffered in a robbery outside of an Oakland bank.

For over 30 years, Jen Angel was a visionary influence and pioneering participant within multiple movements and sub-cultures that significantly informed and shaped our lives.

Jen provided a model of a life well-lived off the beaten track, in pursuit of a new, better, and more just world.

Her involvement in punk rock and independent publishing in the 1990s helped to codify the DIY ethic that defines the radical sub-culture. This work contributed to energizing the global justice and anti-war movements beginning in Seattle in 1999 and the early 2000s.

It infused the anarchist politics characterizing this era of activism, culminating in Occupy Wall Street in 2011. Jen's projects, passion, and drive have been a through-line in these social movements over the decades. These movements were a catalyzing force behind contemporary fights for racial justice, police abolition, climate justice, economic justice, and queer and gender liberation.

Jen founded the social justice event production organization, Aid & Abet in 2006, and before that was the co-founder and publisher of *Clamor Magazine*, a bi-monthly radical magazine published from 1999 to 2006.

Following media relations work we did together during the Occupy movement, in 2013, she and I co-founded Agency, an anarchist PR project, that promotes anarchist ideas through



Jen Angel blockades the entrance to the Chevron refinery in Richmond, Calif. in 2008 to protest the oil company's profiting from the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Photo: Nupur Modi-Parekh

commentary, media relations, and educational campaigns. The mission and infrastructure she made possible continue to endure.

Promoting the ideas of anarchism were especially important to Jen, as was anarchist publishing. She authored *Becoming the Media: A Critical History of Clamor Magazine* for PM Press in 2008, and was part of the organizing collective for the Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair for many years. She was involved in planning the 2023 event at the time of her passing.

As an anarchist, Jen did not believe in state violence or carceral punishment as an effective or just solution to social violence and inequity. This message has been a core part of our work

at Agency. Because her case has been classified as a homicide, Jen's family and friends have had to respond to the media attention to her life and the circumstances leading to her death.

The parties responsible for Jen's death have not been found. If the Oakland Police Department make an arrest in her case, the family is committed to pursuing all available alternatives to traditional prosecution, such as restorative justice.

"She was adamantly against using the state or police force to solve problems. I know she would have wanted to find a way to heal our communities from this tragedy that didn't perpetuate more injustice," said her partner, Ocean Mottley, an attorney who supports formerly incarcerated people.

This is what Jen believed in. It's critical that stories referencing Jen's life should not further inflame narratives of fear, hatred, and vengeance. She opposed the use of public resources for policing, incarceration, and other forms of state violence that

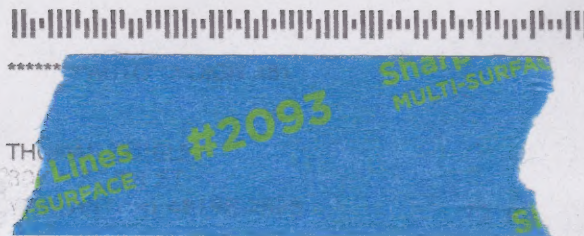
only perpetuate the cycles of violence which resulted in her death.

Jen believed in a world where everyone lives a dignified and joyful life and worked toward an ecologically sustainable and deeply participatory society in which all people have access to the things they need, decisions are made by those most directly affected by them, and everyone is free and equal.

The outpouring of mutual aid, solidarity, and care for Jen, her family, and friends is a resounding demonstration of the values Jen believed in. Jen Angel's legacy is one that contains multitudes, among them was a deep commitment to safety and dignity for everyone.

Rest in power, dear friend.

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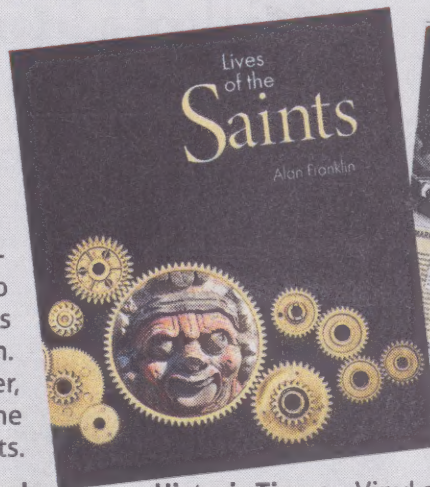
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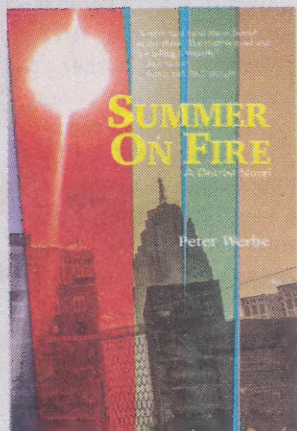
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